

# THE ARGOSY.

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## THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

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### CHAPTER XXVIII.

#### RESTITUTION.

TIME had gone on; weeks and weeks; though there is not much to tell of their passing. Things generally remained pretty much as they had been. The Levels were abroad again. Mrs. Brightman on the whole was better, but had occasional relapses; Annabel spent most of her time at Hastings; and Tom Heriot had not yet been captured.

Tom was now at an obscure fishing village on the coast of Scotland, passing himself off as a fisherman, owning a small boat and pretending to catch fish. This did not appease our anxiety, which was almost as great as ever; still, it was something to have him away from London. Out of Great Britain he refused to go.

Does the reader remember George Coney's bag of money, that had so strangely disappeared the night of Mr. Brightman's death? From that hour to this nothing had been seen or heard of it: but the time for it was now at hand. And what I am about to relate may appear a very common-place ending to a mystery—though, indeed, it cannot be said yet that it was the ending. In my capacity of story-teller I could have invented a hundred romantic incidents, and worked them, and the reader, up to a high point of interest; but I can only record the incident as it happened, and its termination was very matter-of-fact.

I sat one evening in the front room: a sitting-room now—and I think this has been said before—smoking my after-dinner cigar. The window was open to the summer air, which all day long had been intensely hot. A letter received in the morning from Gloucestershire from Mr. Coney, to which his son had scrawled a postscript: "Has that bag turned up yet?" set me thinking of the loss, and from that I fell to thinking of the other loss of the Clavering will, which had

followed close upon it. Edmund Clavering, by the way, had been with me that day to impart a bit of news: he was going to be married; to a charming girl, too; and we were discussing the settlements. My Lady Clavering, he said, was figuring at Baden-Baden, and report ran that she was about to espouse a French Count with a fierce moustache.

Presently I took up the *Times*, not opened before that day, and was deep in a police case, which had convulsed the court in Marlborough Street with laughter, and was convulsing me, when a vehicle dashed down Essex Street. It was the van of the Parcels Delivery Company.

"Mr. Strange live here?" was the question I heard, from the man who had descended from the seat beside the driver, when Watts went out.

"All right," said Watts.

"Here's a parcel for him. Nothing to pay."

The driver coqueted with his horse, then turned sharp round, and—overturned the van. It was not the first accident of a similar nature, or the last, by many, that I have seen in that particular spot. How it is I don't know, but drivers, especially cabmen, have an unconquerable propensity for pulling their horses round in a dangerously short fashion at the bottom of Essex Street, and sometimes the result is that they come to grief. I threw down my newspaper and leaned out at the window, watching the fun. The street was covered with parcels, and the driver and his friend were throwing off their consternation in choice language. One hamper could not be picked up: it had contained wine, loosely packed, and the broken bottles were lying in a red pool. Where the mob collected from that speedily arrived to assist was a marvel. The van at length took its departure up the street, considerably shorn of the triumph with which it had dashed down.

This had taken up a considerable space of time, and it was growing too dark to resume my newspaper. Turning from the window, I proceeded to examine the parcel which Watts had brought up on its arrival and placed on the table. It was about a foot square, wrapped in brown paper, sealed and tied with string; and, in what Tony Lumpkin would have called a confounded cramped, up-and-down hand, where you could not tell an izzard from an R, was directed "C. Strange, Esquire."

I took out my penknife, cut the string, and removed the paper; and there was disclosed a pasteboard box with green edges, which was also sealed. I opened it, and from a mass of soft paper, put in to steady its contents, took out a small canvas bag, tied round with tape, and containing thirty golden sovereigns!

From the very depth of my conviction, I believed it to be the bag we had lost. It was the bag; for, on turning it round, there were Mr. Coney's initials, S. C., neatly marked with blue cotton, as they

had been on the one left by George. It was one of their sample barley bags. I wondered if they were the same sovereigns. Where had it been? Who had taken it? And who had returned it?

I rang the bell, and then called to Watts, who was coming up to answer it, to bring Leah also. It was my duty to tell them, especially Leah, of the money's restitution, as they had been inmates of the house when it was lost.

Watts only stared and ejaculated; but Leah, with some colour, for once, in her pale cheeks, clasped her hands. "Oh, sir, I'm thankful you have found it again!" she exclaimed. "I'm heartily thankful!"

"So am I, Leah," I said. "Though the mystery attending the transaction is as great as ever; indeed, more so."

It certainly was. They went down again, and I sat musing over the problem. But nothing could I make out of it. One moment I argued that the individual taking it (whoever it might be) must have had temporary need of money, and, the difficulty over, had now restored the money. The next, I wondered whether anyone could have taken the bag inadvertently, and had now discovered it. I locked the bag safely up, wrote a letter to George Coney, and then went out to confide the news to Arthur Lake.

Taking the short cuts and passages that lead from Essex Street to the Temple, as I generally did when bound for Lake's chambers, I was passing onwards, when I found myself called to—or I thought so. Standing still in the shade, leaning against the railings of the Temple gardens, was a slight man of middle height: and he seemed to say "Charley."

Glancing in doubt, half stopping as I did so, yet thinking I must have been mistaken, I was passing on, when the voice came again.

"Charley!"

I stopped then. And I declare that in the revulsion it brought me you might have knocked me down with a feather; for it was Tom Heriot.

"I was almost sure it was you, Charles," he said in a low voice, "but not quite sure."

I had not often had such a scare as this. My heart, with pain and dismay, beat as if it meant to burst its bonds.

"Can it possibly be *you*?" I cried. "What brings you here? Why have you come again?"

"Reached London this morning. Came here when dusk set in, thinking I might have the luck to see you or Lake, Charley."

"But why have you left Scotland? You were safer there."

"Don't know that I was. And I had grown tired to death of it."

"It will end in death, or something like it, if you persist in staying here."

Tom laughed his gay, ringing laugh. I looked round to see that no one was about, or within hearing.

"What a croaker you are, old Charley ! I'm sure you ought to kill the fatted calf, to celebrate my return from banishment."

"But, Tom, you *know* how dangerous it is and must be for you to be here in London."

"And it was becoming dangerous up there," he quickly rejoined. "Since the summer season set in, those blessed tourists are abroad again, with their staves and knapsacks. No place is safe from them, and the smaller and obscurer it is, the more they are sure to find it. The other day I was in my boat in my fishing toggery, as usual, when a fellow comes up, addresses me as 'My good man,' and plunges into queries touching the sea and the fishing-trade. Now who do you think that was, Charles ?"

"I can't say."

"It was James Lawless, Q.C. The leader who prosecuted at my trial."

"Good heavens !"

"I unfastened the boat, keeping my back to him and my face down, and shot off like a whirlwind, calling out that I was behind time, and must put out. I took good care, Charles, not to get back before the stars were bright in the night sky."

"Did he recognise you ?"

"No—no. For certain, no. But he would have done so had I stayed to talk. And it is not always that I could escape as I did then. You must see that."

I saw it all too plainly.

"So I thought it best to make myself scarce, Charles, and leave the tourists' haunts. I sold my boat ; no difficulty in that ; though, of course, the two men who bought it shaved me ; and came over to London as fast as a third-class train would bring me. Dare not put my nose into a first-class carriage, lest I should drop upon some one of my old chums."

"Of all places, Tom, you should not have chosen London."

"Will you tell me, old fellow, what other place I could have pitched upon ?"

And I could not tell.

"Go where I will," he continued, "it seems that the Philistines are likely to find me out."

We were pacing about now, side by side, keeping in the shade as much as possible, and speaking under our breath.

"You will have to leave the country, Tom ; you must do it. And go somewhere over the seas."

"To Van Diemen's Land, perhaps," suggested Tom.

"Now be quiet. The subject is too serious for jesting. I should think — perhaps — America. But I must have time to consider. Where do you mean to stay at present ? Where are you going to-night ?"

"I've been dodging about all day, not showing up much ; but

I'm going now to where I lodged last, down Blackfriars way. You remember?"

"Yes, I remember: it is not so long ago."

"It is as safe as any other quarter, for aught I can tell. Anyway, I don't know of another."

"Are you well, Tom?" I asked. He was looking thin, and seemed to have a nasty cough upon him.

"I caught cold some time ago and it hangs about me," he replied. "Oh, I shall be all right now I'm here," he added carelessly.

"You ought to take a good jorum of something hot when you get to bed to-night —"

Tom laughed. "I *am* likely to get anything of that sort in any lodging I stand a chance of to-night. Well done, Charley! I haven't old Leah to coddle me."

And somehow the mocking words made me realise the discomforts and deprivations of Tom Heriot's present life. How would it all end?

We parted with a hand-shake: he stealing off on his way to his lodging, I going thoughtfully on mine. It was a calm summer evening, clear and lovely, the stars twinkling in the sky, but all its peace had gone out for me.

It was impossible to foresee what the ending would or could be. At any moment Tom might be recognised and captured, so long as he inhabited London; and it might be difficult to induce him to leave it. Still more difficult to cause him to depart altogether for other lands and climes.

Not long before, I had consulted with Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar as to the possibility of obtaining a pardon for Tom. That he had not been guilty was indisputable, though the law had deemed him so. But the Sergeant had given me no encouragement that any such movement would be successful. The very fact, as he pointed out, of Tom Heriot's having escaped clandestinely would tell against him. What, I said then, if Tom gave himself up? He smiled, and told me I had better not ask his opinion upon the practical points of the case.

So the old trouble was back again in full force, and I knew not how to cope with it.

The summer sun, glowing with light and heat, lay full upon Hastings and St. Leonards. The broad expanse of sea sparkled beneath it; the houses that looked on the water were burning and blistering in the fierce rays. Miss Brightman, seated at her drawing-room window, knitting in hand, observed that it was one of the most dazzling days she remembered.

The remark was made to me and to Annabel. We sat at the table together, looking over a book of costly engravings that Miss Brightman had recently bought. "I shall leave it with you, Charles," she said,

"when I go away ; you will take care of it. And if it were not that you are tied to London, and it would be too far for you to go up and down daily, I would leave you my house also—that you might live in it, and take care of that during my absence."

Mrs. Brightman had come to her senses. Very much, I confess, to my astonishment, much also I think to Annabel's, she had put aside her prejudices and consented to our marriage. The difficulty of where her daughter was to be during Miss Brightman's sojourn in Madeira, had in a degree paved the way for it. Annabel would of course have returned to her mother ; she begged hard to be allowed to do so : she believed it her duty to be with her. But Miss Brightman would not hear of it, and, had she yielded, I should have interposed my veto in Mr. Brightman's name. In Hatch's words, strong in sense but weak in grammar, "their home wasn't no home for Miss Annabel."

Mrs. Brightman could only be conscious of this. During her sojourn at Brighton and for some little time after her return home, she had been very much better ; had fought resolutely with the insidious foe, and conquered. But alas ! she fell away again. Now she was almost as bad as ever ; tolerably sober by day, very much the opposite by night.

Miss Brightman, dating forward, seeing, as she feared, only shoals and pitfalls, and most anxious for Annabel, had journeyed up to Clapham to her sister-in-law, and stayed there with her a couple of days. What passed between them even Hatch never knew ; but she did know that her mistress was brought to a penitent and subdued frame of mind, and that she promised Lucy Brightman, with many tears, to *strive* to overcome her fatal habit for the good God's sake. And it was during this visit that she withdrew her opposition to the marriage ; when Miss Brightman returned home she carried the consent with her.

And my present visit to Hastings was to discuss time and place, and other matters ; more particularly the question of where our home was to be. A large London house we were not yet rich enough to set up, and I would not take Annabel to an inferior one ; but I had seen a charming little cottage at Richmond that might suit us—if she liked the locality.

Closing the book of engravings, I turned to Miss Brightman, and entered upon the subject. Suddenly her attention wavered. It seemed to be attracted by something in the road.

"Why, bless my heart, *it is !*" she cried in astonishment. "If ever I saw Hatch in my life, that is Hatch—coming up the street ! Annabel, child, give me the glasses."

The glasses were on the table, and I handed them to her. Annabel flew to the window and grew white. She was never free from fears of what might happen in her mother's house. Hatch it was, and apparently in haste.

"What can be the matter?" she gasped. "Oh, Aunt Lucy!"

"Hatch is nodding heartily, as if not much were wrong," remarked Miss Brightman, who was watching her through the glasses. "Hatch is peculiar in manner, as you are aware, Mr. Charles, but she means no disrespect with it."

I smiled. I knew Hatch quite as well as Miss Brightman knew her.

"Now what brings you to Hastings?" she exclaimed, rising from her chair, when Hatch was shown in.

"My missis brought me, ma'am," returned Hatch with composure. "Miss Annabel, you be looking frightened, but there's nothing wrong. Yesterday morning, all in a flurry like, your mamma took it into her head to come down here, and we drove down with ——"

"Drove down?"

"Yes, ma'am, with four posters to the carriage. My missis can't abear the rail; she says folks stare at her: and here we be at the Queen's Hotel, she, and me, and Perry."

"Would you like to take a chair, Hatch?" said Miss Brightman.

"My legs is used to standing, ma'am," replied Hatch with a nod of thanks, "and I've not much time to linger. It was late last night when we got here. This morning, up gets my missis and downstairs she comes to her breakfast in her sitting-room, and me with her to wait upon her, for sometimes her hands is shaky and she prefers me to Perry or anybody else ——"

"How has your mistress been lately?" interposed Miss Brightman.

"Better, ma'am. Not always quite the thing, though a deal better on the whole. But I must get on about this morning," added Hatch impressively. "'Waiter,' says my missis when the man brings up the coffee. 'Mum?' says he. 'I am subject to spadical attacks in the chest,' says she, 'and should like to have some brandy in my room: they take me sometimes in the middle of the night. Put a bottle into it, the very best French, and a corkscrew. Or you may as well put two bottles,' she goes on, 'I may be here some time.' 'It shall be done, mum,' says he. I was as vexed as I could be to hear it," broke off Hatch, "but what could I do? I couldn't contradict my missis and tell the man that no brandy must be put in her room, or else she'd drink it. Well, ma'am, I goes down presently to my own breakfast with Perry, and while we sat at it a chambermaid comes through the room: 'I've put two bottles of brandy in the lady's bedroom, as was ordered,' says she. With that Perry looks at me all in a flutter—he have no more wits to turn things off than a born idiot. 'Very well,' says I to her, eating at my egg as if I thought nothing, 'I hopes my missis won't have no call to use 'em, but she's took awful bad in the chest sometimes, and it's as well for us to be ready.' 'I'm sure I pities her,' says the girl, 'for there ain't nothing worse than spasms. I has 'em myself occasional ——'"

When once Hatch was in the full flow of a narrative, there was no getting in a word edgeways, and Miss Brightman had to repeat her question twice : " Does Perry know the nature of the illness that affects Mrs. Brightman ? "

" Why, in course he does, ma'am," was Hatch's rejoinder. " He couldn't be off guessing it for himself, and the rest I told him. Why, ma'am, without his helping, we could never keep it dark from the servants at home. It was better to make a confidant of Perry, that I might have his aid in screening the trouble, than to let it get round to everybody. He's as safe and sure as I be, and when it all first came out to him he cried over it, to think of what his poor master must have suffered in mind before death took him. Well, ma'am, I made haste over my breakfast, and I went upstairs, and there was the bottles and the corkscrew, so I whips 'em off the table and puts them out of sight. Mrs. Brightman comes up presently and looks about and goes down again. Three separate times she comes up, and the third time she gives the bell a whirl, and in runs the chambermaid, who was only outside. ' I gave orders this morning,' says my lady, ' to have some brandy placed in the room.' ' Oh, I have got the brandy,' says I, before the girl could speak ; ' I put it in the little cupboard here, ma'am.' So away goes the girl, looking from the corners of her eyes at me, as if suspicious I meant to crib it for my own use : and my mistress began : ' Draw one of them corks, Hatch.' ' No, ma'am,' says I, ' not yet ; please don't.' ' Draw 'em both,' says missis—for there are times," added Hatch, " when a trifle puts her out so much that it's hazardous to cross her. I drew the cork of one, and missis just pointed with her finger to the tumbler on the wash-hand-stand, and I brought it forward and the decanter of water. ' Now you may go,' says she ; so I took up the corkscrew. ' I told you to leave that,' says she, in her temper, and I had to come away without it, and the minute I was gone she turned the key upon me. Miss Annabel, I see the words are grieving of you, but they are the truth, and I can but tell them."

" Is she there now—locked in ? " asked Miss Brightman.

" She's there now," returned Hatch, with solemn enunciation, to make up for her failings in grammar, which was never anywhere in times of excitement ; " she is locked in with them two bottles and the corkscrew, and she'll just drink herself mad—and what's to be done ? I goes at once to Perry and tells him. ' Let's get in through the winder,' says Perry—which his brains is only fit for a gander, as I've said many a time. ' You stop outside her door to listen again. Downright harm,' says I, ' that's what you'll do ; and I'll go for Miss Brightman.' And here I'm come, ma'am, running all the way."

" What can I do ? " wailed Miss Brightman.

" Ma'am," answered Hatch, " I think that if you'll go back with me, and knock at her room door, and call out that you be come to pay her a visit, she'd undo it. She's more afeared of you than of anybody

living. She can't have done herself much harm yet, and you might coax her out for a walk or a drive, and then bring her in to dinner here—anything to get her away from them two dangerous bottles. If I be making too free, ma'am, you'll be good enough to excuse me—it is for the family's sake. At home I can manage her pretty well, but to have a scene at the hotel would make it public."

"What is to be the ending?" I exclaimed involuntarily as Miss Brightman went in haste for her bonnet.

"Why the ending must be—just what it will be," observed Hatch philosophically. "But, Mr. Charles, I don't despair of her yet. Begging your pardon, Miss Annabel, you'd better not come. Your mamma won't undo her door if she thinks there's many round it."

Annabel stood at the window as they departed, her face turned from me, her eyes blinded with tears. I drew her away, though I hardly knew how to soothe her. It was a heavy grief to bear.

"My days are passed in dread of what tidings may be on the way to me," she began, after a little time given to gathering composure. "I ought to be nearer my mother, Charles; I tell Aunt Lucy so almost every day. She might be ill and dead before I could get to her, up in London."

"And you will be nearer to her shortly, Annabel. My dear, where shall our home be? I was thinking of Richmond—"

"No, no," she interrupted, in sufficient haste to show me she had thoughts of her own.

"Annabel! It shall not be *there*: at your mother's. Anywhere else."

"It is somewhere else that I want to be."

"Then you shall. Where?"

She lifted her face like a pleading child's, and spoke in a whisper. "Charles, let me come to you in Essex Street."

"*Essex Street!*" I echoed in surprise. "My dear Annabel, I will certainly not bring you to Essex Street and its inconveniences. I cannot do great things for you yet, but I can do better than that."

"They would not be inconveniences to me. I would turn them into pleasures. We would take another servant to help Watts and Leah; or two if necessary. You would not find me the least encumbrance; I would never be in the way of your professional rooms. And in the evening when you had finished for the day we would dine, and go down to mamma's for an hour, and then back again. Charles, it would be a happy home: let me come to it."

But I shook my head. I did not see how it could be arranged; and said so.

"No, because at present the idea is new to you," returned Annabel. "Think it over, Charles. Promise me that you will do so."

"Yes, my dear; I can at least promise you that."

There was less trouble with Mrs. Brightman that day than had been anticipated. She opened her door at once to her sister-in-law,

who brought her back to the Terrace. Hatch had been wise. In the afternoon we all went for a drive in a fly, and returned to dinner. And the following day Mrs. Brightman with her servants departed for London in her travelling carriage, no scandal whatever having been caused at the Queen's Hotel. I went up by train early in the morning.

It is surprising how much thinking upon a problem simplifies it. I began to see by degrees that Annabel's coming to Essex Street could be easily managed ; nay, that it would be for the best. Miss Brightman strongly advocated it. At present a large portion of my income had to be paid over to Mrs. Brightman in accordance with her husband's will, so that I could not do as I would, and must study economy. Annabel would be rich in time ; for Mrs. Brightman's large income, vested at present in trustees, must eventually descend to Annabel ; but that time was not yet. And who knew what expenses Tom Heriot might bring upon me ?

Changes had to be made in the house. I determined to confine the business rooms to the ground floor ; making Miss Methold's parlour, which had not been much used since her death, my own private consulting room. The front-room on the first floor would be our drawing-room, the one behind it the dining-room.

Leah was in an ecstasy when she heard the news. The workmen were coming in to paint and paper, and then I told her.

“ Of course, Mr. Charles, it—is — ”

“ Is what, Leah ? ”

“ Miss Annabel.”

“ It should be no one else, Leah. We shall want another servant or two, but you can still be major-domo.”

“ If my poor master had only lived to see it ! ” she uttered, with enthusiasm. “ How happy he would have been ! how proud to have her here ! Well, well, what turns things take ! ”

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### CONFESSiON.

OCTOBER came in ; and we were married early in the month, the wedding taking place from Mrs. Brightman's residence, as was of course only right and proper. It was so very quiet a wedding that there is not the least necessity for describing it—and how can a young man be expected to give the particulars of his own ? Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar was present ; Lord and Lady Level, now staying in London, drove down for it ; and Captain Chantry gave his niece away. For Mrs. Brightman had chosen to request him to accept her invitation to do so, and to be accompanied by his wife, Lady Grace. Miss Brightman was also present, having travelled up from Hastings the day before. Three or four days later on, she would sail for Madeira.

I could not spare more than a fortnight from work, leaving Lennard as my locum tenens. Annabel would have been glad to spare less, for she was haunted by visions of what might happen to her mother. Though there was no especial cause for anxiety in that quarter just now, she could never feel at ease. And on my part I was more anxious than ever about Tom Heriot, for more reasons than one.

The fortnight came to an end, all too soon: and late on the Saturday evening we reached home. Watts threw open the door, and there stood Leah in a silk gown. The drawing-room, gayer than it used to be, was bright with a fire and preparations for tea.

"How home-like it looks!" exclaimed Annabel. "Charles," she whispered, turning to me with her earnest eyes, as she had been wont to do when a child: "I will not make the least noise when you have clients with you. You shall not know I am in the house: I will take care not to drop even a reel of cotton on the carpet. I do thank you for letting me come to Essex Street: I should not have seemed so completely your wife had you taken me to any but your old home."

The floors above were also in order, their chambers refurnished. Leah went up to them with her new mistress, and I went down to the clerks' office, telling Annabel I should not be there five minutes. One of the clerks, Allen, had waited; but I had expected Lennard.

"Is Mr. Lennard not here?" I asked. "Did he not wait? I wrote to him to do so."

"Mr. Lennard has not been here all day, sir," was Allen's reply. "A messenger came from him this morning, to say he was ill."

We were deep in letters and other matters, I and Allen, when the front door opened next the office door, and there stood Arthur Lake, laughing, a light coat on his arm.

"Fancy! I've been down the river for a blow," cried he. "Just landed at the pier here. Seeing lights in your windows, I thought you must have got back, Charley."

We shook hands, and he stayed a minute, talking. Then, wishing good-night to Allen, he backed out of the room, making an almost imperceptible movement to me with his head. I followed him out, shutting the office door behind me. Lake touched my arm and drew me outside.

"I suppose you've not heard from Tom Heriot since you were away," breathed Lake, in cautious tones, as we stood together on the outer step.

"No; I did not expect to hear. Why?"

"I saw him three days ago," whispered Lake. "I got a queer-looking letter on Wednesday morning from one Mr. Dominic Turk, asking me to call at a certain place in Southwark. Of course I guessed it was Tom, and that he had moved his lodgings again; and I found I was right."

"Dominic Turk!" I repeated. "Does he call himself *that*?"

Lake laughed. "He is passing now for a retired schoolmaster. Says he's sure nobody can doubt he is one as long as he sticks to that name."

"How is he? Has any fresh trouble turned up? I'm sure you've something bad to tell me."

"Well, Charley, honestly speaking, it is a bad look-out, in more ways than one," he answered. "He is very ill, to begin with; also has an idea that a certain policeman named Wren has picked up an inkling of his return, and is trying to unearth him. But," added Lake, "we can't very well talk in this place. I've more to say—"

"Come upstairs, and take tea with me and Annabel," I interrupted.

"Can't," said he; "my dinner's waiting. I'm back two hours later than I expected to be; it has been frizzling, I expect, all the time. Besides, old fellow, I'd rather you and I were alone. There's fearful peril looming ahead, unless I'm mistaken. Can you come round to my chambers to-morrow afternoon?"

"No: we are going to Mrs. Brightman's after morning service."

"It must be left until Monday, then; but I don't think there's much time to be lost. Good-night."

Lake hastened up the street, and I returned to Allen and the letters.

With this interruption and with all I found to do, the five minutes' absence I had promised my wife lengthened into twenty. At last the office was closed for the night, Allen left, and I ran upstairs, expecting to have kept Annabel waiting tea. She was not in the drawing-room, the tea was not made, and I went up higher and found her sobbing in the bedroom. It sent me into a cold chill.

"My love, what is this? Are you disappointed? Are you not happy?"

"Oh, Charles," she sobbed, clinging to me, "you *know* I am happy. It is not that. But I could not help thinking of my father. Leah got talking about him; and I remembered once his sitting in that very chair, holding me on his knee. I must have been about seven years old. Miss Methold was ill—"

At that moment there came a knock and a ring at the front door. Not a common knock and ring, but sharp, loud and prolonged, resounding through the house as from some impatient messenger of evil. It startled us both. Annabel's fears flew to her mother; mine to a different quarter, for Lake's communication was troubling and tormenting me.

"Charles! if—"

"Hush, dear. Listen."

As we stood outside on the landing, her heart beating against my encircling hand, and our senses strained to listen, we heard Watts open the front door.

"Has Mr. Strange come home?" cried a voice hurriedly—that of a woman.

"Yes," said Watts.

"Can I speak to him? It is on a matter of life and death."

"Where do you come from?" asked Watts, with habitual caution.

"I come from Mr. Lennard. Oh, pray do not waste time!"

"All right, my darling; it is not from your mother," I whispered to Annabel, as I ran down.

A young woman stood at the foot of the stairs; I was at a loss to guess her condition in life. She had the face and manner of a lady, but her dress was poor and shabby.

"I have come from my father, sir—Mr. Lennard," she said in a low tone, blushing very much. "He is dangerously ill: we fear he is dying, and so does he. He bade me say that he must see you, or he cannot die in peace. Will you please be at the trouble of coming?"

One hasty word despatched to my wife, and I went out with Miss Lennard, hailing a cab, which had just set down its freight some doors higher up. "What is the matter with your father?" I questioned, as we whirled along towards Blackfriars Bridge, in accordance with her directions.

"It is an attack of inward inflammation," she replied. "He was taken ill suddenly last night after he got home from the office, and he has been in great agony all day. This evening he grew better; the pain almost subsided; but the doctor said that might not prove a favourable symptom. My father asked for the truth—whether he was dying, and the answer was that he might be. Then my father grew terribly uneasy in mind, and said he must see you if possible before he died—and sent me to ascertain, sir, whether you had returned home."

The cab drew up at a house in a side street, a little beyond Blackfriars Bridge. We entered, and Miss Lennard left me in the front sitting-room. The remnants of faded gentility were strangely mixed with bareness and poverty. Poor Lennard was a gentleman born and bred, but had been reduced by untoward misfortune. Trifling ornaments stood about; "anti-macassars" were thrown over the shabby chairs. Miss Lennard had gone upstairs, but came down quickly.

"It is the door on the left, sir, on the second landing," said she, putting a candle in my hand. "My father is anxiously expecting you, but says I am not to go up."

It was a small landing, nothing in front of me but a bare white-washed wall, and *two* doors to the left. I blundered into the wrong one. A night-cap border turned on the bed, and a girlish face looked up from under it.

"What do you want?" she said.

"Pardon me. I am in search of Mr. Lennard."

"Oh, it is the next room. But—sir! wait a moment. Oh, wait, wait!"

turned to her in surprise, and she put up two thin white hands

in an imploring attitude. "Is it anything bad? Have you come to take him?"

"To take him! What do you mean?"

"You are not a sheriff's officer?"

I smiled at her troubled countenance. "I am Mr. Strange—come to see how he is."

Down fell her hands peacefully. "Sir, I beg your pardon: thank you for telling me. I know papa has sometimes been in apprehension, and I lie here and fear things till I am stupid. A strange step on the stairs, or a strange knock at the door, sets me shaking."

The next room was the right one, and Lennard was lying in it on a low bed; his face looked ghastly, his eyes wildly anxious.

"Lennard," I said, "I am sorry to hear of your illness. What's the matter?"

"Sit down, Mr. Strange; sit down," he added, pointing to a chair, which I drew near. "It is an attack of inflammation: the pain has ceased now, but the doctor says it is an uncertain symptom: it may be for better, or it may be for worse. If the latter, I have not many hours to live."

"What brought it on?"

"I don't know: unless it was that I drank a draught of cold water when I was hot. I have not been very strong for some time, and a little thing sends me into a violent heat. I had a long walk, four miles, and I made nearly a run of it half the way, being pressed for time. When I got in, I asked Leah for some water, and drank two glasses of it, one after the other. It seemed to strike a chill to me at the time."

"It was at the office, then. Four miles! why did you not ride?"

"It was not your business I was out on, sir; it was my own. But whether that was the cause or not, the illness came on, and it cannot be remedied now. If I am to die, I must die; God is over all: but I cannot go without making a confession to you. How the fear of death's approach alters a man's views and feelings!" he went on, in a different tone. "Yesterday, had I been told I must make this confession to you, I should have said, Let me die, rather; but it appears to me now to be an imperative duty, and one I must nerve myself to perform."

Lennard lay on his pillow, and looked fixedly at me, and I, not less fixedly, at him. What, in the shape of a "confession," could he have to make to me? He had been managing clerk in Mr. Brightman's office long before I was in it, a man of severe integrity, and respected by all.

"The night Mr. Brightman died," he began under his panting breath, "the bag of gold was missing—George Coney's. You remember it?"

"Well?"

"I took it."

Was Lennard's mind wandering? He was no more likely to take gold than I was. I sat still, gazing at him.

"Yes, it was I who took it, sir. Will you hear the tale?"

A deep breath, and the drawing of my chair closer to his bedside, was my only answer.

"You are a young man, Mr. Strange. I have taken an interest in you since you first came, a lad, into the office, and were under my authority—Charles, do this; Charles, do the other. Not that I have shown any especial interest, for outwardly I am cold and undemonstrative; but I saw what you were and liked you in my heart. You are a young man yet, I say; but, liking you, hoping for your welfare, I pray Heaven that it may never be your fate, in after life, to be trammelled with misfortunes as I have been. For me they seem to have had no end, and the worst of them in later years has been that brought upon me by an undutiful and spendthrift son."

In a moment there flashed into my mind *my* later trouble in Tom Heriot: I seemed to be comparing the one with the other. "Have you been trammelled with an undutiful son?" I said aloud.

"I have been, and am," replied Lennard. "It has been my later cross. The first was that of losing my property and position in life, for, as you know, Mr. Strange, I was born and reared a gentleman. The last cross has been Leonard—that is his name, Leonard Lennard—and it has been worse than the first, for it has kept us *down* and in a perpetual ferment for years. It has kept us poor amongst the poor: my salary, as you know, is a handsome one, but it has chiefly to be wasted upon him."

"What age is he?"

"Six-and-twenty yesterday."

"Then you are not forced to supply his extravagance, to find money for his faults and follies. You are not obliged to let him keep you down."

"By law, no," sighed poor Lennard. "But these ill-doing sons sometimes entwine themselves around your very heartstrings; far rather would you suffer and suffer than not ward off the ill from them. He has tried his hand at many occupations, but remains at none; the result is always trouble: and yet his education and intellect, his good looks and perfect, pleasant manners would fit him for almost any responsible position in life. But he is reckless. Get into what scrape he would, whether of debt, or worse, here he was sure of a refuge and a welcome: I received him, his mother and sisters loved him. One of them is bed-ridden," he added in an altered tone.

"I went first by mistake into the next room. I probably saw her."

"Yes, that's Maria. It is a weakness that has settled in her legs; some chronic affection, I suppose; and there she has lain for ten months. With medical attendance and sea air, she might be restored, they tell me, but I can provide neither. Leonard's claims have been too heavy."

"But should you waste means on him that ought to be applied to her necessities?" I involuntarily interrupted.

He half raised himself on his elbow, and the effort proved how weak he was, and his eyes and his voice betrayed a strange earnestness. "When a son, whom you love better than life itself, has to be saved from the consequences of his follies, from prison, from worse disgrace even than that, other interests are forgotten, let them be what they may. Silent, patient needs give way to obtrusive wants that stare you in the face, and that may bear fear and danger in their train. Mr. Strange, you can imagine this."

"I do. It must ever be so."

"The pecuniary wants of a young man, such as my son is, are as the cry of the horse-leech. Give! give! Leonard mixes sometimes with distant relatives, young fellows of fashion, who are moving in a sphere far above our present position, although I constantly warn him not to do it. One of these wants, imperative, and to be provided for in some way or other, occurred the beginning of February in this year. How I managed to pay it I can hardly tell, but it stripped me of all the money I could raise, and left me with some urgent debts upon me. The rent was owing, twelve months the previous December, and some of the tradespeople were becoming clamorous. The landlord, discerning the state of affairs, put in a distress, terrifying poor Maria, whose illness had then not very long set in, almost to death. That I had not the means to pay the man out you may judge, when I tell you that we had not the means to buy a joint of meat or a loaf of bread."

Lennard paused to wipe the dew from his brow.

"Maria was in bed, wanting comforts; Charlotte was worn out with apprehension; Leonard was away again, and we had nothing. Of my wife I will not speak: of delicate frame and delicately reared, the long-continued troubles have reduced her to a sort of dumb apathy. No credit anywhere, and a distress in for rent! In sheer despair, I resolved to disclose part of my difficulty to Mr. Brightman, and ask him to advance me a portion of my next quarter's salary. I hated to do it. A reduced gentleman is, perhaps, overfastidious. I know I have been so, and my pride rose against it. In health, I could not have spoken to you, Mr. Charles, as I am now doing. I went on, shilly-shallying for a few days. On the Saturday morning Charlotte came to me with a whisper: 'That man in the house says if the rent is not paid to-night, the things will be taken out and sold on Monday: it is the very last day they'll give.' I went to the office, my mind made up at length, and thinking what I should say to Mr. Brightman: should I tell him part of the truth, or should I urge some plea, foreign to it. It was an unusually busy day: I daresay you remember it, Mr. Charles, for it was that of Mr. Brightman's sudden death. Client after client called, and no opportunity offered for my speaking to him in private. I waited for him

to come down, on his way out in the evening, thinking I would speak to him then. He did not come, and when the clients left, and I went upstairs, I found he was stopping in town to see Sir Edmund Clavering. I should have spoken to him then, but you were present. He told me to look in again in the course of the evening, and I hoped I might find him alone then. You recollect the subsequent events of the night, sir?"

"I shall never forget them."

"When I came in, as he directed me, between seven and eight o'clock, there occurred that flurry with Leah—the cause of which I never knew. She said Mr. Brightman was alone, and I went up. He was lying in your room, Mr. Charles; had fallen close to his own desk, the deep drawer of which stood open. I tried to raise him; I sprinkled water on his face, but I saw that he was dead. On the desk lay a small canvas bag. I took it up and shook it. Why, I do not know, for I declare that no wrong thought had then come into my mind. He appeared to have momentarily put it out of the drawer, probably in search of something, for his private cheque-book and the key of the iron safe, that I knew were always kept in the drawer, lay near it. I shook the bag, and its contents sounded like gold. I opened it, and counted thirty sovereigns. Mr. Brightman was dead. I could not apply to him; and yet money I must have. The temptation upon me was strong, and I took it. Don't turn away from me, sir. There are some temptations too strong to be resisted by man in his necessities."

"Indeed, I am not turning from you. The temptation was overwhelmingly great."

"Indeed," continued the sick man, "the devil was near me then. I put the key and the cheque-book inside, and I locked the drawer, and placed the keys in Mr. Brightman's pocket, where he kept them, and I leaped down the stairs with the bag in my hand. It was all done in a minute or two of time, though it seems long in relating it. Where should I put the bag, now I had it? Upon my person? No: it might be missed directly, and inquired for. I was all in a tumult: scarcely sane, I believe, and I dashed into the clerks' office, and, taking off the lid of the coal-box, put it there. Then I tore off for a surgeon. You know the rest. When I returned with him you were there; and the next visitor, while we were standing round Mr. Brightman, was George Coney, after his bag of money. I never shall forget the feeling when you motioned me to take Mr. Brightman's keys from his pocket to get the bag out of the drawer. Or when—after it was missed—you took me with you to search for it, in the very office where it was, and I moved the coal-box under the desk. Had you only happened to lift the lid, sir!"

"Ah!"

"When the search was over, and I went home, I had put the bag in my breast-pocket. The gold saved me from immediate trouble, but ——"

"You have sent it back to me, you know ; the bag and the thirty pounds."

"Yes, I sent it back—tardily. I *could* not do it earlier, though the crime coloured my days with remorse, and I never knew a happy moment until it was restored. But Leonard had been back again, and restoration was not easy."

Miss Lennard opened the door at this juncture. "Papa, the doctor is here. Can he come up? He says he ought to see you."

"Oh, certainly, he must come up," I interposed.

"Yes, yes, Charlotte," said Lennard.

The doctor came in, and stood looking at his patient, after putting a few questions. "Well," said he, "you are better; you will get over it."

"Do you really think so?" I asked joyfully.

"Decidedly I do, now. It has been a sharp twinge, but the danger's over. You see, when pain suddenly ceases, mortification sometimes sets in, and I could not be sure. But you will do this time, Mr. Lennard."

Lennard had little more to say; and, soon after the doctor left, I prepared to follow him.

"There's a trifle of salary due to me, Mr. Strange," he whispered; "that which has been going on since Quarter Day. I suppose you will not keep it from me?"

"Keep it from you! No. Why should I? Do you want it at once? You can have it if you do."

Lennard looked up wistfully. "You do not think of taking me back again? You will not do that?"

"Yes I will. You and I shall understand each other better than ever now."

The tears welled up to his eyes. He laid his other hand—I had taken one—across his face. I bent over him with a whisper.

"What has passed to-night need never be recurred to between us: and I shall never speak of it to another. We all have our trials and troubles, Lennard. A very weighty one is lying now upon me, though it is not absolutely my own—*brought* upon me, you see, as yours was. And it is worse than yours."

"Worse!" he exclaimed, looking at me.

"More dangerous in its possible consequences. Now mind," I broke off, shaking him by the hand; "you are not to attempt to come to Essex Street until you are quite strong enough for it. But I shall see you here again on Monday, for I have two or three questions to ask you as to some of the matters that have transpired during my absence. Good-night, Lennard, keep up a good heart; you will outlive your trials yet."

And when I left him he was fairly sobbing.

## CHAPTER XXX.

## DANGER.

MRS. BRIGHTMAN was certainly improving. When I reached her house with Annabel on the following day, Sunday, between one and two o'clock, she was bright and cheerful, and came towards the entrance-gates to meet us. She, moreover, displayed interest in all we told her of our honeymoon in the Isle of Wight and of the places we had visited. Besides that, I noticed that she took water with her dinner.

"If she'll only keep to it," said Hatch, joining me in her uncemonious fashion as I strolled in the garden later, smoking a cigar. "Yes, Mr. Charles, she's trying hard to put bad habits away from her, and I hope she'll be able to do it."

"I hope and trust she will!"

"Miss Brightman went back to Hastings the day after the wedding-day," continued Hatch; "but before she started she had a long interview with my mistress, they two shut up in missis's bedroom alone. For pretty nigh all the rest of the day, my missis was in tears, and she have not touched nothing strong since."

"Nothing at all!" I cried in surprise, for it seemed too good to be true. "Why, that's a fortnight ago! More than a fortnight."

"Well, it is so, Mr. Charles. Not but that missis has tried as long and as hard before now—and failed again."

It was Monday evening before I could find time to go round to Lake's—and he did not come to me. He was at home; poring over some difficult law case by lamp-light.

"Been in court all day, Charley," he cried. "Have not had a minute to spare for you."

"About Tom?" I said, as I sat down. "You seem to say that you had more unpleasantness to tell me."

"Aye, about Tom," he replied, turning his chair to face me, and propping his right elbow upon his table. "Well, I fear Tom is in a bad way."

"In health, you mean?"

"I do. His cough is frightful, and he is more like a skeleton than a living being. I should say the illness has laid hold of his lungs."

"Has he had a doctor?"

"No. Asks how he is to have one. Says a doctor might (they were his own words) smell a rat. Doctors are not called in to the class of people lodging in that house unless they are dying: and it would soon be seen by any educated man that Tom is not of *their* kind. My opinion is, that a doctor could not do him much good now," added Lake.

He looked at me as he spoke; to see, I suppose, whether I took in his full meaning. I did—unhappily.

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He looked at me as he spoke; to see, I suppose, whether I took in his full meaning. I did—unhappily.

"And what do you think he is talking of now, Charles?" returned Lake. "Of giving himself up."

"Giving himself up! What, to justice?"

Lake nodded. "You know what Tom Heriot is—not much like other people."

"But why should he think of *that*? It would end everything."

"I was on the point of asking him why," said Lake. "Whether I should have had a satisfactory answer, I cannot say; I should think he could not give one; but we were interrupted. Miss Betsy Lee came in."

"Who? What?" I cried, starting from my chair.

"The young lady you told me of who lives in Lambeth—Miss Betsy Lee. Sit down, Charley. She came over to bring him a pot of jelly."

"Then he has let those people know where he is, Lake! Is he mad?"

"Mad as to carelessness," assented Lake. "I tell you Tom Heriot's not like other people."

"He will leave himself no chance."

"She seems to be a nice, modest little woman," said Lake, "and I'll go bail her visit was quite honest and proper. She had made this jelly, she told Tom, and she and her father hoped it would serve to strengthen him, and her father sent his respects and hopes to hear that Captain Strange was feeling better."

"Well, Lake, the matter will get beyond me," I said in despair. "Only a word dropped, innocently, by these people in some dangerous quarter, and where will Tom be?"

"That's just it," said Lake. "Policeman Wren is acquainted with them."

"Did you leave the girl there?"

"No. Some rough man came into the room smoking, and sat down, evidently with the intention of making an evening of it; he lives in the same house and has made acquaintance with Tom, or Tom with him. So I said good-night, and the girl did the same, and we went down together. 'Don't you think Captain Strange looks very ill, sir?' said she as we got into the street. 'I'm afraid he does,' I answered. 'I'm sure he does, sir,' she said. 'It's a woful pity that somebody should be coming upon him for a big back debt just now, obliging him to keep quiet in a low quarter!' So that is what Tom has told his Lambeth friends," concluded Lake.

Lake gave me the address in Southwark, and I determined to see Tom the next evening. In that, however, I was disappointed. One of our oldest clients, passing through London from the country on his way to Pau, summoned me to him on the Tuesday evening.

But I went on Wednesday. The stars were shining overhead as I traversed the silent street, making out Tom's lodgings. He

had only an attic bedroom, I found, and I went up to it. He was partly lying across the bed when I entered.

I almost thought even then that I saw death written in his face. White, wan, shadowy it looked; much changed, much worn from what it was three weeks before. But it lighted up all over with a smile, as he got up to greet me.

" Halloa, Charley ! " cried he. " Best congratulations ! Made yourself into a respectable man. All good luck to yourself and madam, I'm thinking of coming to Essex Street to pay the wedding visit."

" Thank you, " said I, " but do be serious. My coming here is a hazard, as you know, Tom ; don't let us waste in nonsense the few minutes I may stay."

" Nonsense ! " cried Tom. " Why, do you think I should be afraid to venture to Essex Street ? —what nonsense is there in that ? Look here, Charley ! "

From some box in a dark corner of the room he got out an old big blue cloak lined with red, and swung it on. The collar, made of some black curly wool, stood up above his ears. He walked about the small room, exhibiting himself.

" Would the sharpest officer in Scotland Yard take me for anyone but old Major Carlen ? " laughed he. " I'm sure I look like his double in this elegant cloak. It was his, once."

" His ! What, Major Carlen's ? "

" Just so. He made me a present of it."

" You have seen him, then ? "

" I sent for him, " answered Tom, putting off the old cloak and coughing painfully after his recent exertion. " I thought I should like to see the old fellow ; I was not afraid he'd betray me ; Carlen would not do that ; and I dropped a quiet note to his club, taking the chance of his being in town."

" Taking the chance ! Suppose he had not been in town, Tom, and the note had fallen into wrong hands—some inquisitive waiter, let us say, who chose to open it ? "

" Well—what then ? A waiter would only turn up his nose at Mr. Dominic Turk, the retired schoolmaster, and close up the note again for the Major."

" And what would Major Carlen make of Mr. Dominic Turk ? "

" Major Carlen would know my handwriting, Charley."

" And he came in answer to it ? "

" He came : and blew me up in a loud and awful fashion ; seemed to be trying to blow the ceiling off. First, he threatened to go out and bring in the police ; next, he vowed he would go straight to Blanche and tell her all. Finally, he calmed down and promised to send me one of his cast-off cloaks to disguise me, in case I had to go into the streets. Isn't it a beauty ? "

" Well, now, Tom, if you can be serious for once, what is going to become of you, and what is to be done ? I've come to know."

"Wish I could tell you ; don't know myself," said he lightly.

"What was it you said to Lake about giving yourself up?"

"Upon my word of honour, Charley, I sometimes feel inclined to do it. I couldn't be much worse off in prison than I am here. Sick and sad, lad, needing comforts that can't be had in such a place as this ; no one to see after me, no one to attend to me. Anyway, it would end the suspense."

I sat turning things about in my mind. It all seemed so full of hazard. That he must be got away from his present quarters was certain. I told him so.

"But you are so recklessly imprudent, you see, Tom," I observed, "and it increases the risk. You have had Miss Betsy Lee here."

Tom flung himself back with a laugh. "She has been here twice, the good little soul. The old man came once."

"Don't you think you might as well take up your standing to-morrow on the top of the monument, and proclaim yourself to the public at large? You try me greatly, Tom."

"Try you because I see the Lees! Come, Charley, that's good. They are as safe as you are."

"In intention, perhaps. How came you to let them know you were to be found here?"

"How came I?" he carelessly rejoined. "Let's see. Oh, I remember. One evening when I was hipped, fit to die of it all and of the confinement to this wretched room, I strolled out. My feet took me to the old ground—Lambeth—and to Lee's. He chanced to see me and invited me in. Over some whisky-and-water I opened out my woes to them ; not of course the truth, but as near as might be. Told them of a creditor of past days that I feared was coming down upon me, so that I had to be in hiding for a bit."

"But you need not have told them where."

"Oh, they'll be cautious. Miss Betsy was so much struck with my cough and my looks that she said she should make some jelly for me, of the kind she used to make for her mother before she died ; and the good little girl has brought me some over here twice in a jar. They are all right, Charley."

It was of no use contending with him. After sitting a little time longer, I promised that he should shortly see me again or hear from me, and took my departure. Full of doubt and trouble, I wanted to be alone, to decide, if possible, what was to be done.

What to do about Tom I knew not. That he required nursing and nourishment, and that he ought to be moved where he could have it, was indisputable. But—the risk!

Three parts of the night I lay awake, thinking of different plans. None seemed feasible. In the morning I was hardly fit for my day's work, and set to it with unsteady nerves and a worried brain. If I had only someone to consult with, some capable man who would help me! I did think of Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar ; but I knew he would

not like it, would probably refuse advice. One who now and again sat in the position of judge, sentencing men himself, would scarcely choose to aid in concealing an escaped convict.

I was upstairs in the dining-room at one o'clock, taking luncheon with Annabel, when the door was thrown back by Watts, and there loomed into the room the old blue cloak with the red lining. For a moment I thought it was the one I had seen the past night in Southwark, and my heart leaped into my mouth. Watts's quiet announcement dispelled the alarm.

"Major Carlen, sir."

The Major unclasped his cloak after shaking hands with us, and flung it across the sofa, just as Tom had flung his on the bed. I pointed to the cold beef and asked if he would take some.

"Don't mind if I do, Charles," said he, drawing a chair to the table: "I'm too much bothered just now to eat as I ought. A pretty kettle-of-fish this is, lad, that you and I have had brought upon us!"

I gave him a warning look, glancing at Annabel. The old fellow understood me—she had not been trusted with the present trouble. That Tom Heriot had effected his escape, Annabel knew, that it was expected he would make his way home, she knew; but that he had long been here, and was now close at hand, I had never told her. Why inflict upon her the suspense I had to endure?

"Rather a chilly day for the time of year," observed the Major, as he coughed down his previous words. "Just a little, Mrs. Strange; underdone, please."

Annabel, who carved at luncheon time, helped him carefully. "And what kettle-of-fish is it that you and Charles are troubled with, Major?" she inquired smiling.

"Ah—aw—don't care to say much about it;" answered the Major, more ready at an excuse than I should have deemed him. "Blanche is up to her ears in anger against Level; says she'll get a separation from him, and all that kind of nonsense. Have you heard from your Aunt Lucy yet, Mrs. Strange?"

So the subject was turned off for the time; but down below, in my office, the Major went at it tooth and nail, talking himself into a fever. All the hard names in the Major's vocabulary were hurled at Tom. His original sin was disgraceful enough, never to be condoned, said the Major; but his present imprudent procedure was worse, and desperately wicked.

"Are Blanche and her husband still at variance?" I asked, when he had somewhat cooled down on the other subject.

"They just are; and are likely to remain so," growled the Major. "It's Blanche's fault. Men have ways of their own, and she's a little fool for wishing to interfere with his. Don't let your wife begin that, Charles; it's my best advice to you. You are laughing! Well, perhaps you and Level don't row in quite the same boat; but you can't foresee the shoals you may pitch into. No one can."

We were interrupted by Lennard : who had come back on the previous day ; pale, and pulled down by his sharp attack of illness, but the same efficient man of business as ever. A telegram had been delivered, which he could not deal with without me.

"I'll be off, then," said the Major ; "I suppose I'm only hindering work. And I wish you well through your difficulties, Charles," he added significantly. Good day, Mr. Lennard."

The Major was ready enough to wish *that*, but he could not suggest any means by which it might be accomplished. "I should send him off to sea in a whaling-boat and keep him there," was all the help he gave.

Lennard stayed beyond time that evening ; and was ready in my private room to go over certain business with me that had transpired during my own absence. I could not give the necessary attention to it, try as earnestly as I would : Tom and his business kept dancing in my brain to the exclusion of other things. Lennard asked me whether I was ill.

"No," I answered ; "at least, not in body." And as I spoke, the thought crossed me to confide the trouble to Lennard. He had seen too much trouble himself not to be safe and cautious, and perhaps he might suggest something.

"Let Captain Heriot come to me," he immediately said. "He could not be safer anywhere. Sometimes we let our drawing-room floor ; it is vacant now, and he can have it. My wife and my daughter Charlotte will attend to his comforts and nurse him, if that may be, into health. It is the best thing that can be done with him, Mr. Charles."

I saw that it was, seeming to discern all the advantages of the proposal at a grasp, and accepted it. We consulted as to how best to effect Tom's removal, which Lennard himself undertook. I dropped a hasty note to "Mr. Turk," to prepare him to be in readiness the following evening, and Lennard posted it when he went out. He had no sooner gone, than the door of my private room slowly opened, and, rather to my surprise, Leah appeared.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for presuming to disturb you here," she said ; "but I can't rest. There's some great trouble afloat ; I've seen it in your looks and ways, sir, ever since Sunday. Is it about Mr. Tom ?"

"Well, yes, it is, Leah."

Her face turned white. "He has not got himself taken, surely !"

"No ; it's not so bad as that—yet."

"Thank Heaven for it !" she returned. "I knew it was him, and I'm all in a twitter about him from morning till night. I can't sleep or eat for dreading the news that any moment may bring of him. It seems to me, Mr. Charles, that one must needs be for ever in a twitter in this world ; before one trouble is mended, another

turns up. No sooner am I a bit relieved about poor Nancy, that unfortunate daughter of mine, than there comes Mr. Tom."

The relief that Leah spoke of was this: Some relatives of Leah's former husband, Nancy's father, had somehow got to hear of Nancy's misfortunes. Instead of turning from her, they had taken her and her cause in hand, and had settled her and her three children in a general shop in Hampshire near to themselves, where she was already beginning to earn enough for a good living. The man who was the cause of all the mischief had emigrated, and meant never to return to Europe.

And Leah had taken my advice in the matter, and disclosed all to Watts. He was not in the least put out by it, as she had feared he would be; only told her she was a simpleton for not having told him before.

*(To be continued.)*



#### THE MEADOWS OF LONG AGO.

OH the sweet wide meadows, the elm-trees tall,  
The lilac that grew by the southern wall,  
The orchards white, and the gardens neat,  
The may, the cowslips, the meadow-sweet,  
The pale dog-roses in every hedge,  
The narrow path, by the coppice edge,  
The path we shall walk by, you and I,  
When the white moon rises, by-and-bye—  
The path we shall walk by? No, ah no!  
It leads through the meadows of long ago.

Our meadows! They've built a chapel there,  
And a row of villas, yellow and bare;  
And down the path where we used to go,  
Stand squalid cottages, all in a row—  
And the elms are gone—and our wood's green maze—  
Where do the lovers walk now-a-days?  
Not through our meadows: the sordid years  
Have built upon them—and all our tears  
Will never teach the dead grass to grow  
On the trampled meadows of long ago!

E. NESBIT.

## WILLIAM COWPER.

IN the Parsonage at Great Berkhamstead there was a stir one morning in 1731, but still a stir of no very uncommon kind. The fact that a baby would be added to the parson's household had nothing remarkably interesting about it, for who could have foreseen that this child was to be a great English poet, whose biography would be written, and whose verse would be read in days to come.

There exists no record of special, early precocity of intellect with regard to Cowper's earliest childhood. No doubt he soon began to take little flights into verse ; but he was probably too shy and timid a boy to reveal such mysteries as these to those around him. His father was chaplain to George the Second, and this fact may very likely have sometimes brought men fresh from the whirl of London life down to the clergyman's fireside, contact with whom may have sharpened the little lad's wits, and given him new ideas of life. One guardian angel was, we know, ever watching round his childhood, lighting it with her clear eyes, making melody for it with her sweet voice, guiding, soothing, uplifting, sheltering his first nervous shrinkings from the rough touch of the outside world, brightening the all too sensitive future of the embryo poet.

Cowper's love for his mother was, no doubt, as his beautiful lines to her picture sufficiently testify, the first strong, awaking feeling of his life. She probably planted the seeds of all that in after days brought forth any good fruit in his character. Had she lived to complete more fully her work in her son, his life would have had doubtless more healthy sunshine in it, and the mists of morbid sensitiveness would have been almost cleared away. But when he was only a boy his mother was called away from his side, and all the hardest stages of his youth had to be made without her.

Cowper was sent early to school, where the shrinking timidity of his disposition caused him to have no very good time among his companions. This same nervous shyness, which made Cowper's school days no bright period for him, also, no doubt, prevented his shining especially in his schoolwork. He was too proudly sensitive to put himself into competition with other boys, and there was no teacher who understood him well enough to bring him forward. Thus the poet's schooldays passed without his singling himself out in any remarkable manner from the mass of boys of his age and advantages.

Soon after he left Westminster School, his friends selected for him about as uncongenial an employment as they could well have chosen for a youth of his inclinations and character. They articled him to a solicitor. As this attorney lived in London, young Cowper was compelled to reside there also, though his every taste and proclivity

drew him irresistibly towards a country life. His native reserve kept him from forming any very special friends among the many comparative strangers with whom he had intercourse. Therefore so much the more close and intimate became his relations with the family of an uncle who was living at that time in town, and who received him almost as a son.

But though an uncle might stand almost in a father's place, that uncle's daughters might not, perhaps, stand exactly in the light of sisters to a young poet. The uncle, however, forgot this fact, and the cousins were allowed the most familiar, unrestrained intimacy together.

The result was that young Cowper became half engaged to his cousin Theodora; not wholly engaged, because the young lady's father, when he found out how matters stood, put a most uncompromising spoke into the swift-rolling wheel of their young love. He liked his nephew very much as a nephew, but it was quite another thing with the old gentleman when he appeared before him in the character of a would-be son-in-law. His parental fears for Theodora's future were most uncomfortably aroused as he noticed the morbid sensitiveness which daily developed more and more in the young man's nature. This was not the sort of stuff to produce a satisfactory son-in-law of whom a man might be proud. No; Miss Theodora must decidedly not be permitted to bind herself by any fixed promise to such a suitor as this.

The disappointment was no doubt a great one for Cowper. Had Theodora married him, and her bright, healthy influence been brought to bear fully and constantly upon him, it is very likely that the balance of his mind would never have given way, as it afterwards did. As it was, his connection with her only served to produce his first fit of thorough hopeless depression.

Young Cowper's friends, who were always peculiarly anxious and ready to make him happy in their way, without waiting to inquire whether it was his own way as well, now took it into their heads that the best thing they could do for him under present circumstances would be to get him some new employment which would fill up his mind and thrust out of it his unlucky love. They did not pause to ask for what sort of work he was most suited, but they endeavoured to procure him some post which they themselves regarded as honourable and respectable.

After using, for some little time, all the influence they possessed with government, they at length contrived to have him made Commissioner of the Court of Bankruptcy. This office was, however, only worth £60 a-year; so his cousin, Major Cowper, contrived also to obtain for him the post of Clerk of the Journals of the House of Commons.

The announcement of the good news of the honours intended him had, however, a strangely different effect from that they had expected

upon the object of their officious care. Cowper at once shrank from the very thought of undertaking an office which would drag him conspicuously into public life, the very thing of all others which he most hated and shunned. His friends, nevertheless, persisted in wanting to make his fortune for him in spite of himself. He would get over all these ridiculous feelings and fancies, they assured him airily. Cowper's morbidness was not in the least degree relieved by their words. His mind dwelt and dwelt, and worked and worked upon the one subject of the distasteful office into which he was to be pushed. On the eve of the day when he was first to appear in public to commence his new functions, the long irritation of nerves from which he had been suffering caused his brain entirely to give way, and his friends found, to their dismay, that all their efforts for his benefit resulted in a cell in a lunatic asylum.

Repose and medical care after a while restored Cowper's mental balance, and he was able to be released from confinement. The first sane, sound conclusion to which he came on his return to reason was, that he was completely unfitted for the stir and bustle and confusion of London life. Country sights and sounds were his highest earthly joy and refreshment, and amid country sights and sounds the remainder of his life should be spent.

His relations now saw that they had made a terrible mistake with regard to him, and, as they were really very fond of him, they set about repairing the evil they had done him as well as they could. They raised a subscription among themselves for his maintenance, each engaging to pay a certain part. They felt that he would never be able to undertake any work that would bring him in a regular yearly income, so they settled what they gave him upon him for life. Then, in order to save him from all business cares, they put the whole management of his affairs into the hands of his friend, Mr. Hill, the attorney. From this time forward this gentleman became a sort of earthly providence to the poet, keeping all pecuniary matters straight and square for him, and watching over his worldly interests with almost father-like care.

Cowper now left London only to return to it in future for short, passing visits. Theodora's engagement to him had been finally broken off when the symptoms of derangement appeared in his mind, so the single tie was snapped which bound him to the great city. The insanity of Cowper was certainly sufficient reason for Theodora's father to insist on the connection with his daughter being put an end to in a decided and summary manner. As for the young lady herself, though she gave him up at the parental command, and on account of his mental disease, she evidently always retained a strong affection for him, for we find her still his friend in after life.

Cowper now went to reside at Huntingdon, in order to be near a brother who lived at Cambridge. The two towns were not so far apart but that, even in those days of slow travelling, the brothers

could easily go and spend a night or two with each other whenever they pleased. We can fancy that these many little journeys through pure, sweet country air and fair, peaceful country scenes must have given infinite refreshment to Cowper's spirit, and have soothed him with a wondrous power. These excursions were probably often made by Cowper on horseback, the ordinary mode of travelling for single men in those days. We can picture the poet riding along in the green spring, or the golden summer-time, gaining inspiration from each blade, each leaf, each trill of bird or hum of insect round him.

There are less pleasant thoughts than these, however, connected with Cowper's stay at Huntingdon. It was there that the disease, which was always lurking in fearful, shadowy shape in the background of his calm genius, took its most terrible form in an inclination for suicide. He withstood it manfully, however, as he did at two or three other periods of his story, helped by his strong religious faith. There are few instances perhaps on record which show so much what real religion can do for a man as that of Cowper. It is very certain that nothing but his firm religious belief kept him from being either a hopeless maniac or a suicide.

It was at Huntingdon that Cowper made a friendship which was to leave a permanent mark for good upon his life.

One day, on coming out of church, he was struck with the appearance of a middle-aged gentleman and lady and their son. There was something in their faces which had a special attraction for him, and their eyes turned towards him as though they, on their side, took interest in him. This mute intercourse went on for some short time, until at length Cowper and the youngest of the trio slipped into speech and then into close exchange of thought. The young man introduced the poet to his parents, and Cowper soon found that, though he heartily liked the gentlemen, there was a wondrous something in the lady which, in its indescribable sweetness, was like the perfume of spring violets, the melody of distant bells, and which exercised a peculiar spell over him. The connection between him and Mrs. Unwin was begun.

Not long after the friendly intimacy had commenced between Cowper and the Unwins, Mr. Unwin died, and his son soon followed him. This double bereavement naturally had the result of making Mrs. Unwin draw nearer to so true and faithful a friend as Cowper. His sympathy now became a need of her life; while, on the other hand, the tender, womanly care with which she watched over him, at once soothing and strengthening him, filled up the great void left in her heart and her existence. Cowper's was just the sort of sensitive nature to expand in the sunshine of a loving woman's eyes and thrive under the delicate touch of a woman's gentle tact. His affection for Mrs. Unwin grew stronger and stronger, until he made her an offer of marriage.

The two would certainly have been united if it had not been that,

just at this period, Cowper's mind once more showed symptoms of derangement. Hereupon they gave up the project of marriage, but resolved to live on as closest, dearest friends. They went to Olney, in Buckinghamshire, and there they resolved to make their home. This was the most fruitful period of Cowper's genius : his verse flowed out in rich, peaceful streams. The calm, restful influence of Mrs. Unwin over him had probably much to do with this development of his highest powers.

The clergyman of Olney was John Newton, a sincerely religious man, yet one whose religion had always a somewhat gloomy tone. He became intimate with Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, and their intercourse together was constant. The effect produced by John Newton on Cowper has been very variously estimated. Some say that he gave him a yet stronger, fuller religious faith, and others that the severity of Newton's views made the poet's mind more morbid and despondent than it was before. Perhaps there is some truth in both these opinions. Newton may have affected Cowper differently at different times, according to the always changeful moods of the poet's quicksilver mind.

And now, at this period, a very bright, interesting scene in Cowper's life rises up before us, and we will pause to take a sketch of it. It is a summer evening. There is a curtain of crimson cloud, bordered with gold, hanging in the west ; there is a little silvery shower of melody falling from the throat of a thrush before he retires for the night ; there is rare incense floating on the breeze, composed of the mixed fragrance of innumerable flowers. From the little town comes ringing a distant peal of children's laughter ; a church clock strikes drowsily hard by.

In a garden four people are sitting, two gentlemen and two ladies. What wondrous depths there are in the eyes of that man, who is leaning against the rose-mantled porch. Is it sadness, is it power, which we read as we gaze into them and strive to decipher their meaning ? And that lady who is sitting near him on the garden bench, with her pale, thoughtful face so tenderly framed by the hair in which there is a net-work of silver threads mingling with the dark braids and by the snowy cap. What a lively interest she rouses in us, though she is neither young nor beautiful. How does her gaze fasten upon the man at her side, as though he were a book, every letter of which has daily some new meaning for her, which she is always longing and yearning to look into !

What a different presence is that of the younger lady, who is reclining with easy, almost lazy grace in the arm-chair she has brought out on to the lawn. What a contrast there is between her fashionable attire of many bright tints, and the quaker-like hue and cut of the other woman's dress. Playful fun seems to be rippling all over her, from the merry twinkle in her eyes down to her little foot, which taps now and then the turf. Her smiles come and go with April

swiftness, the gestures of her small, ringed hands talk nearly as much as her lips. No wonder these two women glance, now and then, at each other with something of suspicion and doubt in their eyes. There is such a contrast between them, and, moreover, they are both so plainly and exclusively occupied with the one thought of observing that man who stands there near the twining roses.

The other gentleman of the group is of a very different stamp from him who absorbs the attention of the ladies. He has placed himself somewhat apart from the rest. His face is rugged and severe, though not without a certain degree of calm dignity; his eyes are chiefly employed with the younger lady, but the gaze is not admiring; there is doubt and distrust in it.

The party have been silent for a few minutes, when the eyes of the lady in the bright, gaily-tinted dress begin to sparkle and dance with mirth, and the sunshine of her smiles to grow more radiant than before. Then she begins to tell a story. Her words are full of animation which thrills through her voice, and the play of her features, and, indeed, her whole person, respond with pantomimic grace to her tale. The thoughtful countenance of the man standing near her first breaks into a passing smile, then all its muscles begin to quiver with suppressed amusement, then he bursts into a peal of ringing laughter. The lady in the grey dress catches the infection, and begins to laugh softly too. That other man, however, leaves the garden with a look of disapproval on his strongly-marked features. His departure is quite unnoticed by the remaining three, they are so wrapped up in the playful magic of the lady's story. Lady Austin is telling Cowper the story of John Gilpin, and Mrs. Unwin cannot but laugh at it, though she and the lively lady are already not the very best of friends. John Newton thinks both the lady and her story frivolous, and goes away in contemptuous silence.

All that night it is said that Cowper laughed at that tale, and next morning he wrote the ballad of "John Gilpin," which was, perhaps, more well-known in his own day than anything that came from his pen. The wits in all the London coffee houses quoted it, and pretty actresses recited it with many a bewitching smile.

To Lady Austin we owe another bit of Cowper's best work. He was one day discussing with her a subject to write upon in blank verse. "What shall I write upon?" he asked, a little wearily.

"Oh, write upon this sofa," cried the lively lady, making a little imperious motion towards the couch on which she was reclining.

This was the origin of "The Sofa" ("The Task"), his task which she had set him.

There is little doubt that Lady Austin had a very bright influence over Cowper; but the rapidly-growing jealousy between her and Mrs. Unwin compelled Cowper to give up, in some measure, his close intimacy with her. Gratitude for Mrs. Unwin's long-tried affection made him consult her wishes and feelings before anything else.

Another woman, Lady Hesketh, the sister of his early love, Theodora, now came forward to become a power for good in Cowper's life. She managed more prudently than Lady Austin had done, and thus did not excite Mrs. Unwin's jealousy, but was regarded by her as a sympathetic friend. She allowed Lady Hesketh to persuade Cowper to change his place of residence from Olney to a more cheerful home at West Underwood, and her equanimity was not at all disturbed when Lady Hesketh announced that some unknown friend had commissioned her to pay Cowper fifty pounds a year for his life. This friend was, however, in reality no other than Theodora, his old love; but the fact was hidden by her and her sister, for very obvious reasons.

The picture of Cowper's latter years is a very touching picture: such flashes of genius, such struggling against mental disease with brave and constant effort. Mrs. Unwin, too, is a pathetic figure at his side, always at her post in watchful, womanly devotion, caring for him and thinking for him, though age and sickness were laying a heavy hand upon her.

There were, however, some bright points in Cowper's declining days. He was granted a pension of three hundred pounds a year—a strong proof that his genius was looked up to in the land with loving and reverent eyes. He formed also a firm friendship at this period with Hayley, an eminent man of letters of that day; the two being at first drawn together through bringing out, conjointly, an edition of Milton. He had many other faithful, affectionate friends besides, who made it their business to propose to him always fresh subjects on which he might write throughout his life: the best preventive against his attacks of mental disease.

Cowper lived till the year 1800, engaged in literary work till the year before his death. His story is one which teaches brave, manly struggles with mental and bodily suffering, and which proves the sovereign power of religion to calm and sweeten even the most troubled life.

ALICE KING.



## AN INCIDENT ON JUBILEE NIGHT.

BY H. FELL.

WHAT a good fellow Joe Rayner was, and who knew this so well as his little wife, Marjory ! They had been married two years now, and she could truly say that during that time no unkind word had fallen from his lips, and no small kindness towards her had been neglected. But Marjory was a good wife and deserved all the happiness she enjoyed.

The young couple were comfortably enough off for beginners, living in a small, cosy house, some distance out of town, where, with good management, they contrived to give some very neat little dinners to Joe's friends when he brought them down from London. But lately there had been no entertaining at The Hutch, for a small stranger had arrived, and since then Mr. and Mrs. Rayner, as well as the nursemaid, had been fully occupied in entertaining him !

Things were settling down a bit now, for the child, who had been extremely delicate at his birth, was getting stronger. Still he was a wee, fragile-looking creature, and, as his parents leant over his cradle at night and watched his tiny face with its delicate pencilled eyebrows—so unusual in an infant—and its sweet regular features, they each felt, though they would not have said so for worlds, that it would be a difficult task to rear him.

But what love and devotion were they not willing to spend upon him ! On the boy's account Marjory, for the first time in her married life, had left her husband and gone to the sea-side with baby for three weeks. On the boy's account they refused a most tempting invitation they could both have accepted, to go for a cruise on the Norfolk Broads ; for his sake Marjory watched and waked at night, and—greatest self-sacrifice of all—for his sake Joe gave up smoking in his bedroom or, indeed, anywhere upstairs. He would have given it up altogether if the doctor had suggested that such self-denial could possibly do the youngster any good.

On the evening of the 20th June, 1887, Joe Rayner came back from the office a bit earlier than usual, and going straight up to the nursery, found his wife sitting there on a low stool, the child on her lap, and "Moosie," the favourite large white angora pussy, in her privileged spot on the hearthrug. Joe threw himself down into an arm-chair and said with a sigh of relief :

" Well, I for one am ready enough to rejoice that the Queen has reigned for fifty years, since it means an off-day for me to-morrow."

" Oh, Joe, I am so glad ! And now we will have a long morning at home with the boy, and in the afternoon you can take me to the common to see the frolic."

"Or is there any other division of my time you would prefer?" asked honest Joe, smiling at this appropriation.

"Well, it is mine, like everything else that belongs to you," she answered playfully. "Oh, look at the boy, Joe," she went on. "I am sure he knows 'Moosie,' and loves her already."

This was scarcely possible yet awhile. But if he did not love the cat now, doubtless he soon would, for no child could possibly play with her soft, furry coat without getting to love her the moment he was capable of such a sentiment.

It was gloriously fine the next morning, as everyone remembers, and Marjory's plans were carried out to the letter. It may sound a dull way to spend a holiday to some folks, but one has only to be hard worked in a London office to understand the blessedness of absolute idleness on an "off-day" at home. To begin with, Joe came down to breakfast very late indeed; and then he indulged in the additional luxury of loitering over the meal; reading the newspaper and smoking a quiet pipe after as he strolled round the garden with Marjory, who had joined him, bringing the gratifying intelligence that the boy was asleep. After lunch the two walked over together to the common about a mile off, inspected the huge bonfire which was ready to be lighted as soon as it grew dark, and watched the sports of the villagers.

"I think I shall stroll up again after dinner," Joe said. "Shall you be too tired to come too?"

"Perhaps not too tired, but I am going to let the maid go out this evening, so I will stay at home and mind the boy and the house."

"And isn't she proud, too, of having a boy to mind!" laughed Joe. He was always teasing Marjory about her fondness for the child; but all the while, silly fellow, he was every bit as fond of him himself.

On that particular afternoon, when Joe and Marjory came home, the boy looked bonnier than usual. He had just learnt the art of smiling; and as they came into his nursery together, after a race who could get there first, he greeted them with his new smile, and they smiled too, as they clasped him in their arms; and the nurse, with tact, slipped out of the room and left those three alone in all their happiness. What perfect happiness it was! — unalloyed by any prescience of the heavy trouble which was so near at hand. Thank God always for this blessed ignorance; for if coming events *did* cast their shadows before them, then, indeed, the sunshine of our lives would be briefer than that of a December day.

As soon as dinner was over the maid went out, and Joe said he was glad to see her go.

"The way that girl glared at every mouthful I ate, as though she considered me the greediest being in the whole world, was enough to take away any fellow's appetite!"

Joe took things very quietly ; but at about half-past eight o'clock he lighted his pipe and strolled up to the common.

Then Marjory was quite alone with her boy. She went up into the nursery and looked at him as he lay asleep in his cradle, with both tiny arms thrown up over his head, an invariable sign with him that he was sound asleep. "Moosey" lay on the hearthrug and was sound asleep too, and Marjory left them both without disturbing them, carefully leaving the door open that she might hear the faintest cry.

It was dark by this time, and when she peeped out of the drawing-room windows before lighting the lamp, she could see a glow in the sky. The Hutch stood on a steep hill, and by going up just to the other end of the garden, not twenty yards away, Marjory would be able to see the bonfire burning on the common. She did not forget her boy, but she knew that no harm could possibly come to him during the few moments she would be away ; and so she ran out of the front door, leaving it open behind her.

As she hurried up the path a sudden gust of wind came, and she heard a loud slam. It surely could not be the front door ? Instantly turning back again, she reached the door, to find that during her momentary absence it had indeed blown-to, and that now no efforts of hers could possibly avail to open it.

Her feelings baffle description. Her boy was alone within, and she was alone without, unable by any means whatsoever, and however great his need of her, to reach him until her husband returned with the latch-key ; for well she remembered that before he started out he had gone round to all the doors and windows in the house, like the careful fellow he was, and seen that they were securely fastened.

Marjory sat down on the doorstep and fairly cried in her distress. Then she went round to the back of the house, and stood beneath the nursery windows. They were tightly closed, and the drawn blinds seemed to shut her off more completely than ever from her darling.

The village clock struck nine. She could scarcely at the earliest expect her husband's return in less than an hour, and if ever time can overstep its natural limits and spread itself out indefinitely, surely that hour was abnormally prolonged to Marjory.

She thought once of going down to the village and seeing if she could find a workman who would force the door for her, but it was unlikely that anyone would be at home on that particular night ; and, moreover, she could not make up her mind, powerless as she was, to leave the house. She had no wrap of any sort, and she was very cold indeed without being conscious of it, as she stood wearily beneath the nursery window, straining her ears to catch the sound of a cry within. But all was silent.

At length, borne over the common by the night breezes, a faint echo of the strains of the National Anthem reached her, and then

she knew that the amusements were over, and that her husband would surely soon be home. This last quarter of an hour was over at length, and she heard his footstep in the quiet lane. She turned faint and leant against the garden gate for support.

"What, waiting for me out here? Why this is quite lover-like!" said Joe cheerily as soon as he caught sight of her.

"Joe!" and the pain in her voice as she uttered that one word instantly alarmed him. "Joe—let me in—I have been shut out—let me in!"

"But the boy?" asked Joe, hardly grasping the situation, though he fumbled with all haste to find the latch-key.

"He is in the cradle—alone—all alone—this cruel long while!"

Joe had opened the door by this time and Marjory was within. Thank God, all was quiet! And her delicate little child had not screamed himself into convulsions! The colour rushed into her white cheeks as she hurried upstairs, Joe following close behind.

They reached the nursery. Perfect silence reigned there, and nothing seemed to have stirred during Marjory's absence except Moosie, who no longer lay upon her footstool. They paused a moment on the threshold, and a deep-drawn sigh of relief expressed Marjory's thankfulness. Then she crept on tip-toe up to the cradle—how white it looked with its snowy curtains and quilt! But—what was that soft white thing at the head of the cot, instead of the baby's dark-brown hair? Joe caught sight of it at the same instant as Marjory, and forced her on one side.

"What is the matter?" she asked faintly.

Joe stooped lower over the cradle, though he saw too well what had happened. The cat was lying curled right round upon the child's face. He picked the animal up (she was fast asleep) and flung her from him upon the floor; then he bent lower still over the cradle until his face touched the little, white still face lying there. It was quite warm, for Moosie's coat was very thick, but—but—

"Go away, Marjory," he said huskily. "Don't look—my girl."

But she was bending over the cradle by this time. He threw off the coverlet and gently gathered the child in his arms. It was their dead treasure which lay there.



## A LITTLE MAID, AN OLD MAID AND THE MAJOR.

By JOYCE DARRELL.

## CHAPTER I.

IN THE WAITING-ROOM.

A MAD rush, a whistle, a slamming of train doors, and the three-thirty for Drayfield started—minus one of its passengers. This was a young lady who had arrived, laden with packages, just one minute too late. She gave a little sigh of resignation and made her way back to the waiting-room, there to get through an hour and a half as well as she could.

It is not a genial, although a most noisy place—the waiting-room of Charing Cross terminus. If you have a headache the perpetual passing to and fro of people is of itself an aggravation. Then the wan light that on an autumn afternoon struggles painfully through the tall and grimy windows gives everybody a sickly and pitiable appearance.

"To think that I must sit here for another hour and a half," thought Maud Carleton dolefully, as yet another individual, making the twenty-fifth in five minutes, bolted through at break-neck speed. "That awful whistle! Such waste of time, too! There is not one of these people that one takes the least pleasure in observing. Here come three more men. Oh! one of them has to wait."

He was a tall, soldierly-looking person of about forty, with a heavy, grizzled moustache and a complexion obviously the worse for tropic suns.

He looked round for a vacant place. There was only one, and that was on the divan next Maud Carleton. She removed her bag to make room for him, and he raised his hat slightly in acknowledgement.

After a few moments, Maud happening to glance sideways at him was struck with the extreme sadness of his air. He did not look sorrowful merely but careworn, as if some deep anxiety were gnawing him. Maud recognised that expression. She had seen it often on a face which she dearly loved, and it roused her quick sympathies.

"Poor man!" she thought. "He wants money, I am sure. An officer apparently. I suppose an Indian officer with debts and a large, sickly family. Perhaps he has a nice face—looks brave. I daresay he fought very well some time, and remained undecorated while other men got everything."

She had reached this point in her conjectures when the object of

them, with a weary, suppressed sigh, drew a letter from his pocket. The address was written very large and stared Maud in the face, "Major Murdoch, 7, Cedar Terrace, W."

Maud gave a great start, and one of her many packages slipped to the ground. She stooped to raise it; and Major Murdoch half mechanically stooped also. He held the letter open now in his hand, and Maud could not help seeing the first line, although she dropped her eyes hastily with a feeling of absolute guilt.

She thanked him for his politeness with a strange thrill in her voice that made him glance at her for the first time.

He saw a pale, sweet wistful little face, with one really beautiful feature in it—a pair of lovely, steadfast blue eyes. They looked at him for a second, then glanced away; but they were fuller of interest and compassion than their owner knew, and Major Murdoch felt slightly troubled. The dusky colour flushed to his cheek as it occurred to him that she had perhaps caught sight of his letter, with its rude opening words which had hurt him like a blow. He did not like to be pitied—no really true and manly nature ever does—and suspecting Maud of such a feeling he felt a shade annoyed with her, but not nearly so much so as if she had been a man—or even an ugly woman. He looked at her again to strengthen his distaste—and the recipe signally failed. Her eyes were fixed on vacancy, but their expression was just as lovely as before—thoughtful, a little mournful, courageous, strangely sweet.

He rose abruptly. It was not nearly time for his train to leave, but he decided to await its starting on the platform. He again raised his hat; but with his eyes firmly downcast. He was determined not to take another glance at his neighbour, and adhered to this determination until he reached the door. Then his eyes were drawn backwards by an irresistible power, and his last look as he vanished met a parting one from Maud Carleton.

She sighed as he went away.

"It would have been unheard of to speak to him, of course, but I wish I could have ventured," she thought. "There are other Murdochs in the world than Jack's, and I daresay many of the name are home on leave at the same time."

Her meditations continued throughout her short and rapid journey to the pretty village where she dwelt. It was a sweet little nook, very full of roses in the summer, and planted with cherry and apple orchards that filled the air with fragrance throughout May and June. A brief walk through these orchards brought you to a wood, where it was pleasant to sit in sunny weather and vainly look for the ever-present, ever-invisible cuckoo. Leafy lanes led past rich meadows, where the kine lay sleeping in the shadow cast by noble oaks and elms. The red-roofed cottages were overgrown with nodding roses, with purple clematis or crimson creeper, according to the season. There was a charming old grey church, with square Norman tower,

where the county families retained their high pews, and where much interest was excited by a quaint tomb on which was the sculptured effigy of a Crusader, the stately dame, his wife, outstretched in stone beside him, while around ran a string course of his kneeling sons and daughters. In warm summer afternoons, while the service proceeded decorously but drowsily, the swallows flying outside backwards and forwards past the windows cast fugitive shadows from their glancing wings on the solemn stone figures.

A sweet nook, sweetest of all naturally in the season when mother earth is fairest; attractive even now on this autumn afternoon when Maud returned to it.

The apple-blossoms were gone, but the fruit hung ruddy on its branches. The swallows had taken wing to lands where the orange scents the air, or mosques lift their snowy domes above the date-tree and the palm.

Maud was glad to be back, and gladder still to perceive, for reasons of her own, that none of her family had come to the Drayfield Station to meet her. She had about half-an-hour's drive between her and home, and her heart beat with the pleasant anticipation that we all feel on returning where we know that a welcome awaits us. Nevertheless, the first place she stopped at was not the pretty building known as Elm Tree Cottage, where she lived with her aunt and a covey of younger brothers and sisters.

As the fly turned into the village she put out her head, and ordered the driver to pull up at the Post-Office.

The post-mistress received her with a smile. She was a bright, gossipy little woman, with one great defect—an insatiable curiosity.

"Good-day, Miss Carleton. So you are back at last! How glad everybody will be to see you! You have been away a fortnight, I think? Yes, a fortnight exactly to-morrow. You enjoyed your holiday, I hope? I am sure you earned it: you work so hard."

There was a slight ring of patronage in these cordial observations, but Maud did not mind. She had a fund of serene earnestness that made her indifferent to the remarks of the world.

"You are very kind, Mrs. Welbrow," she answered, smiling. "I don't work any harder than everybody should do, I think. You are continually busy yourself."

"Thank you, Miss Carleton; you have always a pleasant answer. And did you do much in town? London is so fatiguing! You went to stay with an old school friend, I hear?"

Mrs. Welbrow looked like a dog with its ears erect, so eager was she for information.

"Yes; but she was in recent trouble, so we led a very quiet life. I want to take out some money, Mrs. Welbrow. I have the book with me," and she produced it from her bag.

The post-mistress looked surprised, and, with her, surprise and inquisitiveness were one. Maud habitually deposited her spare cash

at the office ; and on leaving for town had drawn the larger part of her savings. It seemed strange to Mrs. Welbrow that she should want more money immediately on her return, especially as she was generally very prudent.

"How much, Miss Carleton ?"

"Ten pounds—in notes, please," and unconsciously Maud blushed. The post-mistress noticed it, for little escaped her eager eyes.

The money brought, Maud put it into an envelope, directed it, and handed it across the counter to be registered. That was a great moment for Mrs. Welbrow, who took full stock of the whole address.

The other little formalities were gone through, and Maud left the Post-Office with her savings diminished to three pounds.

"Who can Major Murdoch be? And why on earth did she need to send him ten pounds?" These were the questions that perplexed Mrs. Welbrow throughout the evening. It was surprising how much she knew of Maud Carleton's affairs and of everybody's. A consistent study of the postmarks and addresses of letters joined to a detective-like instinct had enabled her to amass an amount of information that was curiously exact. She knew that Maud had few intimate correspondents and that those few were mostly women. Once a fortnight or so she received a letter from a brother in India ; and sometimes she had letters from firms or institutions, presumably containing orders.

But Major Murdoch! That was quite a new name. Perhaps he was an admirer whom she had met in London : but then why send him ten pounds? It might be for a commission, of course, but Mrs. Welbrow made a point of never contenting herself with one hypothesis, she liked to go through the whole gamut. And so she did in the present instance, till her head would have ached if it had not been so clear.

Meanwhile, she promised herself to keep a sharp eye on Miss Carleton's future correspondence.

Maud, all unconscious of the mental commotion she had caused, meanwhile proceeded on her way, and in five minutes more had turned into the pretty lane where her home was placed.

As the fly drew up in front of Elm Tree Cottage, eager young faces appeared at the windows ; thence quickly vanished and reappeared instantly in the porch. Boisterous greetings, accompanied by the frantic barkings of two or three dogs ensued, and Maud, in a general confusion of affectionate relatives, smiling servants, and canine friends, was escorted to the parlour, there to be more quietly but not less gladly greeted by her aunt.

A chorus of voices alternately questioned Maud and related the events of the past fortnight. Then, when Maud had taken the first edge off the general curiosity and produced her presents, the younger members of the party dispersed and the dogs followed them.

The group thus reduced to Aunt Hester and her two eldest nieces became much quieter and the conversation flowed more tranquilly.

"Then you had a dull time of it after all! You did not meet anybody interesting?" inquired Edith, whose zest for life was intense, as became her years.

"No," said Maud; but felt that her denial was perhaps not quite sincere, for it was within the bounds of possibility that she had met somebody *very* interesting—somebody who had been a hero to Elm Tree Cottage for two years past.

"Well, *I* have some news," said Aunt Hester, and smiled triumphantly—mysteriously. Maud looked up. Edith's eyes grew big with curiosity.

"Your Aunt Mary told it to me this morning," continued the good lady, and again paused. She liked to make the most of a piece of excitement when she possessed one, being usually in the position of the dullest member of the family, to whom nothing of importance ever happened, the young people opined, and who sat at home and had news poured into her.

"Vine Cottage is let."

"Is that all!" exclaimed Edith in a tone of the keenest disappointment.

"To whom?" inquired Maud, out of politeness chiefly, for she did not like her aunt to be snubbed. But she started, and the blood rushed to the roots of her hair, when she heard the answer.

"To Major Murdoch."

"Major Murdoch! Our Major? Jack's friend? Oh! Aunt Hester!" Edith, from whom these rapid exclamations poured, was trembling with excitement.

"You see, even *I* have something to tell of interest sometimes," pursued Aunt Hester. "He came here yesterday to pay a visit to the Bowens: drove over from the Abbey, where he is staying with his sick boy. He saw Vine Cottage, took a fancy to it, and closed with it at once."

Maud listened in silence. Then it could but have been he whom she had seen at the terminus. He must have travelled down in the same train with her, but had not got out at the same station, his destination being further along the line. For a moment she rejoiced.

Then came an awful reflection. The Silcombe post-mark, of which she had never thought till this moment, would reveal whence the money had come! He would set inquiries on foot, question her aunt and uncle, the Bowens perhaps, and eventually discover Maud's identity with his unknown benefactress. What would he think of her? An act which had seemed to her natural an hour before, now appeared heinous, transfigured as it was by the fierce light of Major Murdoch's certain indignation. Poor Maud underwent a perfect agony of regret.

Edith meanwhile was continuing her string of breathless questions.

"What was he like? Was he tall? Short? Fat? Thin? Was the little boy with him? *Why* had Aunt Mary allowed him to go away without bringing him to Elm Tree Cottage?"

"He was in a hurry. The Abbey people had probably made him promise to return there as quickly as possible. They had insisted on his bringing down the sick boy for a change. Poor Major Murdoch!" and Mrs. Sherlock shook her mild head.

"Why do you say 'Poor Major Murdoch,' Aunt Hester?" It was still Edith who questioned.

"He is very unhappy, and has had a sorrowful life. His wife was a bad woman; but we must say no harm of her, for she is dead. None of the children lived except this poor boy, who is deformed in consequence of a fall."

Maud listened to this conversation with mixed feelings of pleasure and pain. She felt very little doubt but that "Jack's Major Murdoch" and her acquaintance of the railway station were identical, and her heart grew warm at the thought. For Jack was her eldest brother: her own special pet, and the hero, pride and joy of the whole family. He had entered the army and gone to India but a few months before the Afghan war, and there had owed his life, on one occasion, to Major Murdoch's self-sacrificing gallantry.

The story, written home by the young soldier himself to Aunt Hester and the brothers and sisters in Elm Tree Cottage, had become a kind of legend round which all that was romantic in their imaginings gathered.

It was a link between their quiet, peaceful lives, and the seething, struggling, outside world. They talked and thought of Jack perpetually, and of his preserver nearly as often, and it is easy to fancy consequently what excitement there was for them in the idea of seeing the latter. Twelve hours previously Maud would have been as pleased as anybody. Now she was disturbed by the thought of the enclosure which she had so precipitately despatched to Cedar Grove.

## CHAPTER II.

### AT THE VILLAGE POST-OFFICE.

"AUNT MARY," or in other words Mrs. Sherlock's sister, Mrs. Bowen, was received with open arms when she appeared, accompanied by her husband, the next morning at the cottage. They drove over from Barham House, their residence, in their pony-carriage—a comfortable-looking pair, and established themselves cosily for a gossip. Gossip was what they delighted in, being retired Anglo-Indians of the old official stamp, full of fussy good nature dashed by a little pomposity.

Maud was not quite sure that she always liked their patronage, but the children were not so fastidious.

Uncle Henry was generous by nature, and Aunt Mary so by imitation ; a disposition of things that resulted in tips and sugar plums.

"Glad to see you again, Maud. We thought your holiday was going to last for ever, child," cried Mrs. Bowen, as, with a chirpy laugh, she subsided into a seat.

Dr. Bowen settled himself as easily as his gout would allow, stroked his grizzled beard and turned his shrewd, good-natured eyes on his eldest niece. "What news, young woman? Was the visit to town a success? Did you pick up an admirer?"

"Where I am concerned, Uncle Henry, your sole idea is an admirer. I shall have to set one up to please you," said Maud good-humouredly.

"They are not always to be had for the seeking, my dear, and therefore must not be despised when found. Painting screens and tables is all very well, but a good husband and a comfortable home are better. What's this I hear about your refusing the young doctor?"

"Oh, Aunt Hester!" exclaimed Maud, as she glanced reproachfully towards that guilty person.

"Don't attack Aunt Hester. It was natural she should tell me. And of course I told Uncle Henry," said Mrs. Bowen.

"And we are come to have it out with you, Maudie, girl," continued the doctor. "Be sensible, my child, and think twice before you throw away such a chance."

"But I don't like him," said Maud.

"Oh, indeed! He has red hair, perhaps? or doesn't play the guitar? I have only seen him once, but he struck me as a tall, well-enough-looking fellow; and I hear he is good at his profession. What more do you require?" urged the old gentleman more seriously.

"Perhaps Maud is waiting for a duke," suggested Aunt Mary.

"Bob and I want her to marry Major Murdoch," suddenly interposed Effie's fresh, childish treble.

A pause of amazement: a violent blush from Maud: a loud laugh from Dr. Bowen and his wife.

"Murdoch? Poor Arthur Murdoch? Marry a Greenwich pensioner at once, child! You would be just as well set up!" exclaimed Uncle Henry.

"Effie's a naughty child," said Mrs. Sherlock, in mild horror. "How could Maud think of marrying a person she has never seen?"

"I cannot understand why Major Murdoch's name should be introduced into our conversation," exclaimed Maud. She spoke with a certain vehemence unusual to her, and the colour rose hotly in her cheeks.

"Hoity-toity!" commented Mrs. Bowen, while Bobby exclaimed: "Well, you needn't be cross! Miss Dodson says you write to him."

“*Miss Dodson!*” The exclamation, in tones of extreme surprise, broke simultaneously from Maud and Mrs. Sherlock. Miss Dodson was the sister of the young doctor whose suit the Bowens had been urging, and of all people in Silcombe she was the very last who would be likely to know Maud’s private affairs.

“Bobbie, you talk too fast,” said Mrs. Sherlock, shaking her head reprovingly at the delinquent.

“I don’t; do I, Effie? Didn’t she say it, just now, in the road? And weren’t we going to ask Maud all about it?”

Effie corroborating these surprising statements, all the juvenile eyes were directed towards Maud in inquiry. She turned pale, but remained resolutely silent. Dr. and Mrs. Bowen began to look very alert and knowing; but, fortunately for her eldest niece, Mrs. Sherlock had but one sentiment—an angry incredulity.

“I call it most impertinent of Miss Dodson! I shall write to her to say that she is quite mistaken, and beg her to give me her authority,” said the good lady.

“Better let the matter be, Hetty,” observed Dr. Bowen.

“Never ask for explanations. That’s always our principle, isn’t it, Henry?”

“Well—it’s mine, my dear,” replied the doctor, drily.

“We have had a delightful drive,” said Mrs. Bowen, addressing her sister. “You will never guess where we have been: to the cemetery—the new one beyond Drayfield. And we have chosen a piece of ground—a sweet spot, where our friends won’t mind coming, even in wet weather: it is so high.”

“Your friends!” echoed Mrs. Sherlock, in gentle bewilderment, her mind not being rapid.

“To visit our graves. I hope you will all come from time to time,” continued Mrs. Bowen hospitably, as she rose to wrap herself snugly in her furs. “We should be sorry to think you meant to forget all about us as soon as we were put away, my old man and I. Well, good-bye, Hester! Good-bye, little people! Don’t fret if the answer to your letter is long in coming, Maud.”

And, pleased with this final little joke, Mrs. Bowen smilingly waddled out, ensconced herself and helped to ensconce her husband in the pony carriage, and, with many nods and hand-wavings, was driven away.

“Aunt Hetty,” said little Effie, solemnly, a few minutes later, “when Aunt Mary and Uncle Henry are put away, will you go to see them often?”

“I daresay I shall, love. It will be my great consolation. Only I think it very likely that your dear uncle and aunt will follow me to my last home, instead of my following them,” concluded Mrs. Sherlock in a tone of pleasing melancholy, for she was slightly hypochondriacal and fond of alluding to her imminent end.

Effie was a sweet, spiritual-looking child with wonderful, dreamy

eyes and a cloud of finest golden curls that encircled her brow like an aureole. She was six, and precocious in mind, but very small and slender. She had the prettiest clinging ways with those she loved—and seemed to possess an inexhaustible store of elfin caresses. Maud she worshipped, and nestled in her arms now, as being the place of all others where she felt herself most at home.

Her mother died in giving her birth, and Maud, already then sixteen and the eldest but one of a family of eight, had stood her far more in lieu of that lost parent than the amiable but slightly incapable Aunt Hester could have done.

For Maud had early learned to be grave and strong—early began to think for others. Her father, whom she loved very dearly, and who died only a month or two before his wife—had been a charming but impecunious man, always in need of sympathy and rarely failing to obtain it. The blighting presence of poverty shadowed all Maud's childhood; but she soon laid its lessons of discipline to heart. Love surrounded her in abundance: and love to weak natures is sometimes a corrosive; but Maud's strong heart and brave spirit only gained from it a deeper capacity for responsive tenderness and ungrudging help.

And now on her little sister she lavished a wealth of affection and watchfulness as requisite as they were wise.

"Maudie, put by those horrid paints and let us go for a walk—just you and me," said Effie coaxingly.

This was a request often proffered but not always granted, at least in winter, when Maud had need of the whole brief day for her painting, and generally only went out by owl's light. On this particular occasion, however, feeling a little restless, she charmed Effie by assent. The child as an additional element of enjoyment suggested that she should wear her new pelisse, which was a recent present from Maud.

It was trimmed with sealskin, and worn with a little sealskin cap, was ravishingly becoming to Effie's small, wistful and delicately-tinted face.

They started off presently, the child holding fast by Maud's hand and chattering gaily. She had a clear, musical voice, a little shrill, such as one might imagine some silver trumpet in Elfland to be; and made very quaint, unexpected observations, so that her society was delightful.

On their way they had occasion to stop at the Post-Office, which being also a kind of general shop was the most frequented place in the village.

Mrs. Welbrow was delighted to see them, but Maud greeted her rather coldly, and showed even less disposition to chat than usual. She could not help feeling with some resentment that if Miss Dodson really did know of her writing to Major Murdoch it could only be through the gossip of the Post-mistress.

While she was briefly giving an order, who should enter upon the scene but Miss Dodson herself. She was to be seen in the shop twenty times a day, having an inordinate love of talking, and condescending therefore to be quite a crony of the Post-mistress's.

She was a worldly-minded old maid, years older than her brother, the young doctor and Maud's lately-rejected suitor. Whilst prepared to detest any woman whom her brother should eventually marry, she yet, inconsistently, was outraged at Maud's impertinence in refusing him.

But she had no intention of quarrelling. That would have shut her out of Mrs. Sherlock's house; and to be shut out from any house was grief to Miss Dodson.

"Oh, Miss Carleton! So you are back. Indeed, I heard you had returned yesterday. However little of a gossip one may be, it is difficult to avoid hearing everything in Silcombe."

"Sometimes even more than is quite correct," said Maud icily.

"Yes, indeed, you are right there. But in that case one requires to be a gossip. Now you never gossip, I am sure, and no more do I. Three yards of navy blue serge, if you please, Mrs. Welbrow. I hope your husband is better? Yes? So glad. As I was saying, Miss Carleton, the irrepressible chattering that goes on in these small places is my abhorrence. When people come to me for news I always say: Don't ask *me*. Ask So-and-So. I never know anything for I ask no questions. You had a dull time in town, I hear. Were with a friend in grief. An *old* friend?"

"A school friend."

"Oh! a school — Married?"

"Yes."

"A professional man's wife, I presume?" Then as Maud did not answer: "Of course in that case you would not be likely to go much into society. I daresay your friend lives in a very quiet way. Now, when I go to town I plunge in a vortex of gaiety. But you made Major Murdoch's acquaintance, I hear?"

"You heard so? From whom?" and Maud fixed her blue eyes steadily on Miss Dodson's face. It remained unabashed, however, although its owner had expected another result to her observation.

"This little lady here told me," she replied promptly, indicating Effie.

"O—h!" cried Effie. "What a big story! You told me."

Miss Dodson hated children, but had an idea that they could be made useful as scapegoats on occasion. She sometimes found, however, that in trusting to them for such a part, she leaned on a broken reed. This was the case now, and she turned purple with annoyance.

"Your memory is short, little Missy, but your tongue is long," she said with a rude laugh.

"You *did* tell me," re-asserted Effie, when Maud interposed.

"Hush, Effie! It is not polite to contradict in that way. Miss Dodson is mistaken, but you must tell her so quietly."

"Mistaken? When I——" Miss Dodson pulled up. She had been on the point of betraying the source of her information. "Do you mean to assert, Miss Carleton, that you do *not* know Major Murdoch—the Major Murdoch who has taken Vine Cottage?"

"Certainly I do. I have never exchanged a word with him. Except from hearsay, he is a perfect stranger to me, and to every member of my family in England. So much I have to say in answer to your questions, Miss Dodson. But as to the propriety of such a cross-examination on your part, you must allow me to remark that there may be two opinions," replied Maud with spirit.

"There *is* Major Murdoch," suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Welbrow, who for reasons of her own had been longing to stop Miss Dodson's tongue.

"Come, Effie, let us go," said Maud, who turned pale with mingled feelings on recognising in the gentleman who had just driven up her chance acquaintance of the day before.

Major Murdoch descended from the pony-carriage, then turned to address some observation to a pale little boy—presumably his son—who occupied the other seat. Thus he had his back towards Maud, who hoped to slip past him unobserved. But he turned round just a minute too soon, and started perceptibly on seeing the young lady. Instinctively he raised his hat. Maud felt it rather than saw it for her eyes were cast down; but she responded with the least little bend of her head. It was enough for the lynx eyes watching her. Miss Dodson and Mrs. Welbrow, exchanged a scandalised glance, and the former's lips noiselessly shaped the one word "Shameless!"

Major Murdoch had come to buy stamps. This purchase completed, he said: "Would you tell me exactly where Elm Tree Cottage is? Sherlock, I think, is the name of the lady living there."

"The second turn to the right; third house on the left," said Mrs. Welbrow; then added affably: "That was Miss Carleton, Mrs. Sherlock's niece, who passed you this minute."

"That Miss Carleton?"

The Major seemed surprised, interested, pleased. He even moved a step towards the door and looked after Maud's vanishing figure. Miss Dodson waited breathless, as did also Mrs. Welbrow. Would Major Murdoch say anything to enlighten them? But he did not: he stood at the door in an absent-minded sort of way that was provokingly inscrutable.

But if virtue is its own reward sometimes, curiosity is so very often. The Major asked for a post-card, and drew out a pocket pen. Miss Dodson's eyes sparkled and an answering gleam flashed from Mrs. Welbrow's. The Major wrote a few lines; then an address. Miss Dodson, on pretence of glancing over a book on the counter,

took a look out of the tail of her eye at the post-card. The colour rose in her cheeks, and Mrs. Welbrow felt consoled for being able to see nothing herself by the conviction that her ally had seen something. The Major said "Good-day" civilly, bowed slightly, and getting again into the carriage, drove off in the direction of Elm Tree Cottage.

"The post-card was directed to Cedar Grove, to Mary Something—perhaps a servant," exclaimed Miss Dodson. "So it is the same Major Murdoch."

Mrs. Welbrow assented, but not quite so eagerly as usual. She was beginning to regret a little that she had allowed so much to be wormed out of her.

"That girl is *shameless!*" commented Miss Dodson. "I hate to be deceived—don't you, Mrs. Welbrow?"

"I do, indeed, Miss Dodson. But what motive can Miss Carleton have for such duplicity? The Major seemed sincere in his surprise on learning her name."

"Oh! you never can tell. Simple-minded people like ourselves have no idea of the wickedness of the world. Doubtless Miss Carleton has been masquerading under some assumed name. It's all as clear as noonday. The very way he bowed was enough to show the terms they are on. My poor brother! He has had an escape indeed. Well, good-bye, Mrs. Welbrow. Pray step over whenever you want anything for your husband. I shall always be glad to see you, for I lead a sort of owl's life down here."

And Miss Dodson started off to pay her daily visit to her dear friend Miss Tippany.

Maud and Effie had a charming ramble, and returned home laden with autumn treasures in the shape of hips and haws and lovely clusters of berries. Alfy and Bobby tumbled out to meet them on their return, both shouting together, "Guess who's been here! Guess who's been here!" then, performing a sort of war dance, accompanied them in mysterious silence to the drawing-room.

"Guess whom we have had!" exclaimed Edith eagerly.

"Yes, guess," said Aunt Hester. Then three voices together: "Major Murdoch and little Paul."

"We saw him, too," said Effie. "He took off his hat. I wanted Maud to speak to him, but she wouldn't. It was at the door of the Post-Office."

"At the Post-Office? Then nobody introduced him to you? Then why did he bow? He does not know you, Maud," said Edith, whose sharpness was sometimes distressing.

"He only raised his hat because he had to pass by me."

"Oh, no, Maudie! He knew you. He wanted to speak; but you wouldn't. You *blushed!*" said Effie solemnly.

"She's blushing now!" exclaimed Alfy and Bobby together.

"You never have met him anywhere before, have you, Maud?"

questioned Mrs. Sherlock, who, in reality the most simple-minded of women, was suspicious by fits from sheer inability to sift evidence.

"How should I?" retorted poor Maud, irritably. Unluckily, irritability in her being an unusual phenomenon attracted an immense amount of attention, and she was nearly stared out of countenance. It was more than she could bear, and she abruptly left the room.

Mrs. Sherlock shook her head; then gently sighed. Extremely amiable by nature, her general attitude was nevertheless one of mild aggrievedness. And sometimes she indulged in the little mental dissipation of thinking that her nephews and nieces did not behave towards her as nicely as they should have done. The idea—perhaps because there was no reality in it—gave her a meek and secret satisfaction.

Major Murdoch had driven over from the Abbey to show Vine Cottage to his little son; then called at Elm Tree Cottage, because he had learnt from the Bowens of the existence of his friend Jack's aunt and sisters. He had sat some time listening to stories of the young officer's childhood and youth, and responding to them politely. He was "very grave and quiet, but nice." That was the verdict pronounced on him by Edith, Alfy and Bobby, and dinned all the evening into Maud's ears.

"We told him you were out, and would be so sorry not to have seen him; but he did not say he had met you," said Edith, with an inquisitive stare, Effie's revelations having sunk into a fertile soil, and yielded a fine crop of conjectures.

"How should he know who I was?" Maud retorted, but, alas! again with that fatal blush. This time it was patent even to Mrs. Sherlock.

"Well, if he bowed ——"

"Oh, that bow! How can you listen to Effie's chatter? I tell you that until you mentioned me, he had probably never even heard of my existence," said Maud, adding, with unnecessary earnestness: "And do let us talk of something else. I am sick of the sound of Major Murdoch's name!"

This was such a heresy that it landed everybody high and dry upon a rock of speechlessness; and Maud had peace for the rest of that evening.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

ANY new arrival at Silcombe furnished food for much superfluous comment, and Major Murdoch proved no exception to the rule. He installed himself in Vine Cottage in the course of a week, and immediately afterwards several particulars, more or less veracious, oozed out about him. They were, on the whole, vaguely unfavour-

able : Miss Dodson took care of that. She had, so to speak, adopted his reputation, and was doing her best to spoil it, moved thereunto partly by an artistic love of scandal for its own sake, partly by dislike of Maud. She had got hold of an idea that if she threw enough mud at the Major, some of it would glance off upon Miss Carleton ; so she pelted with a will.

"Major Murdoch was very poor ;" "Quite in shady circumstances, in fact ;" "Suspected of debt ;" "Separated from his wife ;" "No, a widower, but of recent make ;" "Had been a bad husband, not a doubt of that ;" "Looked depressed ;" "Had an air of shabby gentility ;" "Kept only a maid-of-all-work ;" "Very odd !"

These were the remarks that floated about ; and it availed nothing that several patent facts concerning the Major were directly or inferentially favourable. As, for example, that he was a gallant officer, a gentleman by birth, a most devoted father. These things won him no indulgence ; for country gossip is of a very capricious order, and at the mercy of every wind that blows. Miss Dodson, in this instance, had started it in one particular direction, and there it set.

One thing that helped to offend people was Major Murdoch's extreme reserve. He politely waived most efforts at acquaintance, and seemed inclined to know nobody but the Bowens and the inhabitants of Elm Tree Cottage. Now, it so happened that Maud, who was, so to speak, the representative member of the latter family, was not profoundly popular. Commonplace people admired her appearance and her intelligence, and felt her distinction ; but they did not take to her warmly. They spoke well of her until somebody spoke ill, and then they were delighted to follow suit.

Some of the comments upon the Major had reached Mrs. Sherlock's ears, and made her vaguely uncomfortable.

She was very much influenced by the world's opinions, having none but acquired ones of her own. And she began to wonder whether Major Murdoch was a fit person for herself and "the children" (as she called the young people) to know. When she consulted her eldest niece, matters were only made worse ; for Maud was fiercely opposed to the notion of Major Murdoch's being treated with anything but the warmest gratitude and friendliness.

Mrs. Sherlock was already a little suspicious : this made her more so. She secretly conversed with the Bowens on the subject. They knew "no harm of poor Arthur Murdoch ;" but admitted that he seemed even poorer than his notoriously straitened means could account for.

In the meanwhile, the Major, always made vociferously welcome by the majority in Elm Tree Cottage, came there with tolerable frequency, and, being something of an artist, showed interest in the progress of Maud's screens and fans. He paid her no special attention, however, but proved himself invariably grave, if genial ; and although he would talk on occasions, it was clearly not his nature to

be either lively or loquacious. Maud, on her part, was always a little constrained and uncomfortable in his presence. The sense of her guilt and the fear of detection combining to weigh her down.

The children got on better. Paul, in spite of his four years' advantage in age, condescended to become friends with Effie, and allowed himself to be patronised by Alfy and Bobby. He was a nice child—very quiet and thoughtful. He had a sweet, rare smile, which would come into his eyes suddenly at the end of a long spell of listening, and indicated the fullest measure of insight into speech and speaker. There was something very sprite-like about this smile, for it seemed to imply that Paul knew much more than anybody suspected.

Between him and his father there existed a silent and undemonstrative, but most touching affection. Paul had endured much pain through all his small length of life, and, although slowly improving, he still suffered at intervals. But a word from his father always seemed to soothe him. In his worst moments, if the Major entered, the child's wan face would brighten ; and always, when the paroxysm subsided, he would drop peacefully to sleep if only his little hand rested in the strong one that held it as tenderly as a woman's.

This love was so absorbing, and had been so intensified by the circumstances of his lonely, invalid life, that Paul had hitherto cherished few other affections, and known hardly any friends. The people at the Abbey were kind to him ; and what was more, he instinctively felt that they loved his father ; therefore he was quietly grateful to them, but never unclosed his heart to them. He was visibly drawn towards Maud, however ; and in another way, also towards Effie, perhaps because both—one in womanly, the other in childish fashion—possessed the rare tact that comes of sympathetic insight.

A chief amusement that he shared with Effie was to make Maud recite Browning's "Pied Piper," and the part which interested him especially was that which related to the lame boy's disappointment at not having been able to follow his playmates into the wondrous cavern.

"I should have been shut out, too," he suddenly remarked one day to Effie.

The colour flushed to her cheeks. She had often made a similar reflection and confided it to Maud ; but never would the fineness of her feeling have permitted her to hint at it to Paul himself. Her first impulse now was to console.

"He was such a *foolish boy to mind*," she said severely. "Of course there were lots of nice things left in the town—all the other children's toys for instance."

"Oh ! I shouldn't have cared at being left behind," said Paul. "Papa says I must never mind about being lame, as legs don't really matter if you have brains."

Effie was seated on a low stool, with her elbows on her knees, and her pretty pointed chin on her hands. Paul's speech was of a nature to plunge her into meditation for some seconds.

"Have you brains?" she inquired at last with great earnestness and sincerity.

"Oh, yes. I'm going to be a literary man."

"What's that?"

"A fellow who writes books. What a goosey you are not to know that!"

"I'm only a little girl. I can't know everything," said Effie. "When I grow up I shall paint like Maudie."

"Oh, that's stupid. It's much better to write books. I mean to make thousands and thousands of pounds."

"What for?"

"To give papa."

"Is he poor, then—your papa?"

"Yes, very. And he has to spend so much for me, and for something else."

"What else?"

"I don't know. He says he'll tell me some day when I'm big."

"That won't be for months and months."

"Why, of course not. Not for three or four years even."

"I'll tell Maudie that he's poor. She makes money sometimes. She could give him some."

"I don't think he would like that," said Paul, doubtfully. "Somebody sent him ten pounds 'anonymously' the other day, and it vexed him so! He would have sent the money back, but there wasn't any address, and he had thrown the envelope into the fire when he tore it off, and so he couldn't even find out the post mark. The people would have been finely punished if he had discovered them—I can tell you," the boy concluded grandly.

That night when Maud was putting Effie to bed she was much startled to hear her announce that she intended, the next time she saw him, to give Major Murdoch the two half-crowns out of her savings-box, but that she must be careful not to do it "anonymously" as that would vex him.

"Why?" said Maud, flushing uncomfortably in an agony of apprehension.

Thereupon Effie proceeded to repeat Paul's story almost word for word, but when she reached the episode of the burnt envelope and its consequences, she suddenly broke off with a little silvery laugh, for Maud gave her such a sudden, fervent hug that she took it for the beginning of a game at kisses: and it was some time afterwards before she could be persuaded to go to sleep.

The knowledge that her impulsive, and as she now was fain to admit unwise, act of generosity had not been found out, lifted a weight from Maud's spirit, and made her manner towards the Major

more frankly, if still rather shyly, cordial. But his towards her remained unaltered. He was kind—interested even to a certain extent—but austerely reserved.

Miss Dodson noticed it, of course, on the few occasions when she saw them together and drew her own conclusions. "They are acting a part," she informed Miss Tippancy, "but the girl is evidently growing tired of it. She begins to show her feelings more than she has any idea of. Probably she cares for him much more than he does for her—the designing minx."

"Poor mamma always said that girls should never show their feelings," observed Miss Tippancy. "Men used to follow her from town to town, but she never encouraged them by so much as a glance."

"Dear me!" said Miss Dodson with a yawn. "What a pity some of them can't rise from their graves and transfer their attentions to you." (That will stop her with her eternal "poor mamma," was her mental comment on this cruel speech.) But Miss Tippancy bridled.

"I can assure you, Miss Dodson, that you are mistaken if you imagine me not to have had as many chances as other girls. But poor mamma always felt that compared with her blood poor papa's was a little inferior ; and so——"

"Yes—yes, I understand. I daresay you might have married an archbishop or a duke if you had liked. Good gracious ! there's a fly drawn up at Major Murdoch's door, and a woman inside it. Well-dressed too ! I never ! Yes—you may ring, madam, but you won't get in. The Major's gone to the Abbey and taken the child with him, and the maid's off on a holiday."

The lady had descended from the cab and was standing in the road gazing in a bewildered way up and down it. She was elegantly but not very tidily dressed, and looked delicate, even from the distance at which Miss Dodson was viewing her.

"I think I will just step over and tell her the Major is away. It will only be good-natured, although I daresay she's no better than she should be." And Miss Dodson prepared to depart.

"Pray be careful ! These improper people are often so rude. Not that I know it from having spoken to even one of them, of course ; but poor papa used to tell poor mamma——"

An energetic bang of the front-door cut short the stream of Miss Tippancy's reminiscences. She could only clasp her hands in feeble deprecation (directed, perhaps, to the shades of her maternal ancestors) and watch Miss Dodson's proceedings.

That energetic lady stepped briskly across the road and addressed the stranger abruptly.

"Major Murdoch is out," she said. "He won't be back, I believe, until to-morrow morning."

The new-comer looked disappointed, for which Miss Dodson was

unfeignedly grateful to her. For an exhibition of feeling always furnished the presumption that she was on the right trail, and possibly about to run her game to earth.

"You are, perhaps, his sister?" she continued affably. "I understood the Major to say that he was expecting a sister."

"What nonsense!" said the lady rather irritably. "He hasn't any sister," and she glanced at Miss Dodson with some contempt. That lady invariably flourished under contempt, and put forth sprouts of cringing. As a necessary concomitant, her new acquaintance rose in her esteem—she no longer had any doubt but that she was a lady.

"Very likely I am mistaken," she exclaimed with an obsequious smile. "I never gossip or mix myself up with my neighbours' affairs. What little I do hear I make a point of forgetting; so how should I know whether the Major had sisters or not?"

The stranger made no reply. She was twitching nervously at a glove which she held in one hand, and seemed absorbed in annoyance.

"Who *can* she be?" Miss Dodson asked herself in an agony of curiosity. The lady had on a wedding ring, so the most likely supposition seemed to be that she was a runaway wife. This pregnant idea made Miss Dodson's pulses bound. What food for gossip if the conjecture proved true! A scandal in high life—perhaps a divorce suit—and the Major even wickeder than Silcombe thought him! Miss Tippany had flattened her nose against the window-pane of her sitting-room, and the sight of her in this attitude spurred Miss Dodson on to further investigation.

"Perhaps you could wait," she suggested blandly.

"I shall certainly wait," was the reply, delivered with rather a harsh laugh. "I am not going back without seeing him, that's certain. And I'm so tired!" She looked it. Her cheeks, indeed, were red and her eyes bright, but both the flush and the brilliancy were hectic.

She was thin and fragile-looking to the last degree, and her hands painfully wasted. But she was still young, and there was an air of great refinement and elegance about her.

"May I offer you my house for an hour or two?" said Miss Dodson. "Later, if Major Murdoch has not returned, my brother—Dr. Dodson, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh—could find you a room for the night."

The lady looked at her: hesitated a moment: then accepted. She dismissed the cabman and accompanied Miss Dodson, who had obsequiously seized her bag and was disappointed to find no initials on it, into the house.

She was barely seated before a fit of coughing came on, which left her in a condition of exhaustion alarming to behold. Miss Dodson, fairly scared, flew for wine, and had no difficulty in inducing her guest to drink two brimming bumpers. After this she revived a little, and Miss Dodson beheld a prospect of reward. Dexterous

cross-questioning might elicit a great deal, she felt, and set to work at once.

"You seem rather an invalid?" she remarked sympathetically.

"It's a case of creaking doors," said the lady. "I believe I ought to have died years ago; but I daresay I shall disappoint both doctors and friends for some time yet."

She spoke feebly, for her voice was nearly gone; but there was a slight ring of viciousness in her words, sufficient to make Miss Dodson prick up her ears.

"Everyone must feel delighted to be thus disappointed. Your brother——. How stupid I am! I think you said Major Murdoch is *not* your brother?"

"No."

Miss Dodson gave a little cough. "A great friend, then?"

"No." Then after a second's pause, as if impelled to say more, the stranger added with an odd smile: "There is scant friendship between us and still less love."

Miss Dodson's eyes nearly started out of her head.

"Tell me something about Major Murdoch," resumed the lady. "Is he liked in this place?"

"Really you could hardly come for information on such points to a worse person than myself. I live here for the sake of my dear brother, and although acquaintances are forced on me, I have no intimates and gossip I abhor——"

"Nonsense."

Miss Dodson, who had repeated her formula mechanically, stared with an air of slight bewilderment for an instant, then continued. "This is a sad chattering place, and people will talk about their neighbours' affairs. Generally what I hear goes in one ear and out of the other. But since you ask me about Major Murdoch, I may say that report declares him to have a special attraction in Silcombe."

"An attraction! What attraction? A woman?" The stranger sat bolt upright with blazing eyes.

"Of course," said the enchanted Miss Dodson briskly. "A young girl, *not* very nice, I think; but my taste is fastidious. However, the gentlemen see a great deal in her, which is, doubtless, what she cares most for. I must confess that even to my unobservant eyes the Major seems immensely fascinated."

"What is her name?" asked the lady huskily. She was shaking from head to foot with unmistakable fury, and Miss Dodson began to feel a little uneasy. Under such circumstances it was a relief to her to hear a ring at the front-door.

"My brother, probably," she said, springing up. "He will be delighted to make your acquaintance. Poor fellow! Silcombe is not what he has been accustomed to. The society of the place so empty-headed and——"

The door opened to admit Miss Tippany, who, able to bear the

pangs of ungratified curiosity no longer, had stepped over "to beg for a skein of wool."

She sat down, looking at the stranger inquisitively, and calmly disregarding the scowl with which Miss Dodson had signified her displeasure at the intrusion.

"Introduce me," said Miss Tippany, *sotto voce*, as she noted the unknown one's elegant attire, and carefully threw back the bonnet strings which obscured "poor mamma's" portrait mounted as a brooch.

The lady carelessly nodded in acknowledgment of the introduction. Then turning her back on poor Miss Tippany with as little ceremony as she would have bestowed on a window-pane, she said impatiently: "You have not told me that girl's name."

"The name of Major Murdoch's *belle passion*? Really, I hardly know if I should be justified —— Miss Tippany will tell you how all her curiosity never elicits a word of gossip from me."

"*My* curiosity, Miss Dodson? Upon my word, you have the strangest notions! Poor mamma—one of the Delagommes of Sark, a name, I fancy, not *quite* unknown in the best circles ——"

"I must go to this girl: take me to her. I have something to tell her. Good heavens, woman, don't sit staring at me in that way! Either finish the statement your slanderous tongue has begun, or take me where I can hear the truth."

The lady had risen, and was standing over the petrified Miss Dodson. With her shrunken frame, trembling all over, her eyes glittering, her breath coming in quick, agonised gasps, she presented a pathetic spectacle of fury made impotent by weakness.

Miss Dodson was frightened, and she hated to be frightened: it made her rude at once.

"Who *are* you?" she exclaimed coarsely. "What is Major Murdoch to you, I should like to know? If you think you will make a cat's-paw of me, you are much mistaken, I can tell you. I asked you in here out of kindness, and I was a fool for my pains. There's the door, madam: you'll be so good as to walk through it at once."

A shriek from Miss Tippany interrupted her. The lady had staggered backwards, and now fell in a heap to the ground. They rushed to her, and on raising her head found that a thin stream of blood was trickling slowly from her mouth. Miss Tippany, frightened out of her wits, began to wring her hands and sob. Miss Dodson was half-demented with rage, but she kept her presence of mind, and hastened to apply such remedies as she could think of. The stranger opened her eyes at last, but remained speechless, and the bleeding increased. Presently her gaze became fixed and glassy, and then even Miss Dodson nearly lost her head. She had sent in hot haste for her brother; and presently, to her infinite relief, he arrived. The lady had again lost all consciousness, and was lying, as her hostess viciously expressed it, "like a log of wood." At his

first glance towards her, Dr. Dodson's expression changed. He approached her quickly, felt her pulse, listened to her heart, then curtly asked for a mirror and held it to her lips. "She is dead!" he announced.

"*Dead!*" Miss Dodson's voice rose to a consternated shriek. "And what on earth am I to do with her?"

"Who is she?" asked the doctor.

"How should I know? She forced herself in here to wait for Major Murdoch. I daresay she was no better —"

"Hush!" cried Miss Tippany, and fell to sobbing again, the nervous, soft-hearted thing.

For once in her life, and for one brief moment, Miss Dodson looked a little abashed. Somehow, a rebuke from so flabby a nature as Miss Tippany's seemed to affect her more than any sterner protest could have done.

Dr. Dodson, feeling very angry with the Major, of whom, as a reputed rival, he was not unwilling to think ill, went off to despatch a telegram to the Abbey; while Miss Tippany, assisted by a servant, proceeded to render some of the last services that the living can bestow on the dead.

The corpse was laid out and covered with such flowers as the season yielded, when the Major, looking very white and stern, drove up.

Dr. Dodson received him, and gave him the only explanation he could furnish. "A stranger—wished to wait—evidently the final stage of consumption—fatigued by the journey," and so on.

Major Murdoch listened in silence, betraying no surprise and no violent emotion. When asked to look at the body, he silently bent his head.

Miss Dodson and her brother accompanied him upstairs to the darkened room, suddenly become so solemn, where the dead woman lay. Miss Tippany, who was standing by the bed, turned the light of a candle upon the wax-like, wasted features; but even then the Major did not speak immediately.

"You know her?" questioned the doctor at last.

"Yes," said Arthur Murdoch gravely. "She was my wife."

*(To be concluded.)*



## HAP AND MISHAP.

By C. J. LANGSTON.

THE lively interest with which an article published under the above title was received four years ago, induces me to give a few more of my humorous clerical experiences and illustrative gatherings to the readers of the ARGOSY.

Churches have been turned inside out since I was a boy; and arrangements connected with the service completely altered, not always with advantage.

Who does not remember the great West Gallery and the imposing organ in the background, with the motley minstrels, and little Benjamin, their ruler, striving dexterously to hang an oblong slate on a nail in a panel in front, whereon was set forth in chalky hieroglyph, the number and first line of the hymn? What quaint spelling have I seen; such as, "The Dismussal him," "Sarm, number foretine" (after a sleepy sermon); with such strange perversions as, "Shure wicked fools must need reppose," "Defend me, Lord, for shame." Sometimes, owing to unskilful fingers, the slate would come crashing down, testing the superior solidity of the bucolic skull; sometimes it would be placed wrong side uppermost, or present a blank to the congregation, which sorely perplexed the old clerk at Upton Snodsbury. Twice he sedately repeated the formula, "Let us sing," and then, jerking off his spectacles, he exclaimed petulantly, "Turn the boord, Jack, hoot!"

A predecessor of mine at B. prided himself upon his singers. "What a gush of euphony voluminously wells," from the violin, the piccolo, the bassoon. He was glad of the help of strangers, and would announce, after the second lesson, "I see some musical friends from Redditch have come in, so that we will have an anthem presently." The custom then was to repeat lines and syllables *ad nauseam*, but often with ludicrous effect. Thus, "Call down Sal," was thrice repeated before the full word salvation was reached; and the line, "Oh Thou to whom all creatures bow," was spun out until it resembled bow-wow-wow-wow. Miss Charlotte Yonge alludes to the custom in Chantry House: "There was an outburst of bassoon, clarinet and fiddle, and the performance that followed was the most marvellous we had ever heard, especially when the big butcher, fiddling all the time, declared in a mighty solo, 'I am Jo-Jo-Jo-Joseph!' and having reiterated this information four or five times, inquired with equal pertinacity, 'Doth my fa-a-u-ther yet live?'"

Does the Reverend L. C. ever call to mind the occasion when, as a wild Irish curate, he entered a Warwickshire church late, and the

prolonged tuning up of wheezy instruments abruptly ceased upon his vociferous exclamation, "Sthop that feedle!"

Speaking of curates, I remember that singularly uninteresting man, Bishop Jacobson, remarking to my incumbent, who had expressed regret at my leaving: "You find the market for curates rather tight, don't you?" The truth is that curates are better off than half the incumbents at the present day, whose income too much resembles that of a vicar in Cumberland in 1832:—"Fifty shillings per annum, a new surplice, a pair of clogs, and feed on the common for one goose." One is almost sorry that the old act of Elizabeth is not in force, which allowed incumbents whose benefices did not exceed twelve pounds per annum to follow some trade. Curates, even in the time of Wickliff, had £3 6s. 8d. per annum; and the Mess-Johns and Trencher-chaplains at the houses of the squires, during last century, had a merry time of it, although the pay was but £26 a-year.

If the singing-gallery was a feature in the churches of fifty years ago, so was the square, spacious, and eminently comfortable family pew. Such is well described by Jane Welsh Carlyle, during her visit to the Bullers at Troston Rectory. "'It is a nice pew that of ours,' said old Mr. Buller; 'it suits me remarkably well; for being so deep I am not overlooked; and in virtue of that, I read most part of the *Femme de Qualité* this morning. But don't,' he added, 'tell Mr. Regy (his son, the Rector) this.' I, also," continues Mrs. Carlyle, "turned the depth of the pew to good account. When the sermon began, I made myself at the bottom of it a sort of Persian couch, out of the praying cushions, laid off my bonnet, and stretched out myself very much at my ease."

My earliest ecclesiastical recollections are associated with the family pew in the centre of a church: purchased, I believe, for a considerable sum some years before; and, therefore, quite as exclusive as the family drawing-room. At each corner adjoining other pews rose a rod of iron several feet high, with four branches ending in small knobs: the whole resembling a plain gas standard. These were designed for gentlemen's hats: and certainly kept them uninjured: but the sight of so many beavers, "the cynosure of neighbouring eyes," dangling in mid-air was anything but devotional.

At Christmas we had further adornment. The decoration known as "twigging" caused sundry sprays of holly and mistletoe to be stuck at the top of the pew: and as my father followed the usual custom of standing with one knee bent on the seat during the prayers, and resting his book on the ledge, the prickly evergreen begot many a mild anathema. Other relatives had a square seat over the family vault, before the sanitary craze set in: and the remembrance that a few inches only separated us from the dust that once was love gave additional interest and solemnity to the spot.

The cosy squire's pew of the eighteenth century was an elaborate structure, luxuriously furnished, and surmounted by crimson curtains.

It often contained the only fire-place in the church, and was never complete without a square table. During the reign of George the First, a coloured footman would enter with a tray of light refreshment just before the sermon. In one of these retreats, Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, being ensconced, was roused from a doze by the exhortation—"Let us pray."

"By all means," shouted the Duke; "I have no objection."

The poor were accommodated in narrow pews, very high and stiff in the back. No wonder a timid child remarked that a man in velvet breeches had sat her on a pantry shelf and shut the door. Not so little Johnny, who, "on the promise to be dood," was taken to church. He kept very still till the last prayer, by which time he had grown so tired that he got up on the cushion of the seat, and stood with his back to the pulpit. When the lady in the seat behind bowed her head for prayer, Johnny thought she was crying, so he leaned over and said in a too audible whisper, "Poor, dear lady, what ee matter? Does oo tummy ache?"

Very formidable must have been the pew with a lattice round it in which that red-haired vixen, Queen Bess, sate to criticise the court preachers. They had to be as particular in their allusions as the chaplains of Louis XIV. "We must all die," exclaimed the preacher. The king frowned fiercely. "All, I mean, save your majesty," added the subtle courtier.

When a bishop or other cleric made mention of anything which did not please the vain old woman, the lattice was rattled with terrible energy and distinctness, to the discomfiture of the unfortunate ecclesiastic. Sometimes she spoke outright, as when the Bishop of St. David's ventured upon statistics which the Queen could not follow: "You keep your arithmetic to yourself: the greatest clerks are seldom the wisest men."

How different was the appreciation of a sermon delivered by my eloquent incumbent in Bosley Church, Cheshire. At the conclusion, the kind vicar, leaping through the paper hoop of rubrical restrictions, exclaimed, "My good people, before we sing the hymn I think we cannot do better than heartily thank Mr. Hughes for his most excellent sermon."

In that same church a local landowner, the Earl of Harrington, placed a stained-glass window containing figures of the Virgin and St. John. Some friends of mine, being shown over the building, asked the venerable clerk the subject. "Thein tur," said he, "are meant for Mr. and Mrs. Harrington, but I can't say as they are much loike."

This equals the result of a friend's efforts when inscribing, in old English letters, "Reverence my sanctuary." The inscription was prominently placed on the ledge of the East window in B—— Church, and puzzled the admiring rustics. At length they came to the conclusion that it was meant for "Reverend Mr. Sculthorpe," the name

of my predecessor. Speaking of sermons, one cannot help noticing how they "hide their diminished heads" until there is little but the tail of their old verbosity left. When ponderous Samuel Parr had concluded the 'Spital Sermon before George the Third, the latter remarked, "I heard something, doctor, in your sermon to-day that I never heard before."

"May I respectfully ask what that was, your Majesty?" lisped the gratified divine, who was expecting a bishopric.

"Well, doctor, I will tell you: I heard the clock strike twice."

Very doubtful was another compliment paid to the late Doctor Armstrong, of Burslem. During the sudden illness of a neighbouring rector, he had come to the rescue. The congregation was scanty; but the eloquence of the doctor excited the enthusiasm of the parish churchwarden.

"I am downright sorry, sir, to see you fishiating in this 'ere poor little place; a much worser gentleman would ha done if we could only have found him."

The description of the Rector of Troston, given by Mrs. Carlyle, is anything but flattering.

"The service went off quite respectably: it is wonderful how little faculty is needed for saying prayers perfectly well. But when we came to the sermon! greater nonsense I have often enough listened to—for, in fact, the sermon (Mrs. Buller with her usual sincerity informed me before I went) was none of his: he had scraped together as many written by other people as would serve him for years; which was better for the congregation." Mrs. Carlyle had merely attended the service to see "how the cratur gets through with it."

What different feelings influenced that excellent lady, the wife of the Rev. E. H. Bray, B.D., Vicar of Tavistock. The whole congregation knew when her dear husband delivered one of his own sermons, which he previously went over at home "word for word, and the gradations of emphasis to be used were indicated by under-scoring with one, two or more lines." On such occasions, Mrs. Bray, drawing aside the curtains of the parsonage pew, untied her bonnet, threw back the strings, and standing on a hassock listened with rapt attention to every word of him who was to her the embodiment of Bishop's melody:—

"Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear."

Most careful was Mrs. Bray of her husband's creature comforts. She always read family prayers each morning; and she would pause in the midst "in order to give the cook some caution or direction for the proper preparation of Mr. Bray's and, indeed, of her own dishes." This reminds me of the like domestic asides of my father. On wet Sundays he would read the whole of the service for the day and one of Blair's or Hooker's sermons to his children with such comical

interpolations as "To ask those things which are requisite (Is that Joe just gone past the window?) When your fathers tempted me (My dear, have you thought of the seasoning for the ducks?) From all evil and mischief (I wish those confounded dogs would keep quiet)."

"The only use of sermons," says Miss Fenwick, "is to make respectable people uncomfortable."

This is almost on a par with a lady of last century who wrote to a titled friend respecting the homely truths preached by George Whitefield. "Such sentiments may do very well for the lower classes: but to tell you and me, my dear, that we are vile sinners is exceedingly improper, not to say vulgar."

The ancient sermon was provocative of sleep; so we find in old church accounts a person appointed to keep people awake by what is termed *bobbing*. Thus in 1736 the churchwardens of Prestwich, near Manchester, resolved "That 13s. a-year be given to George Grimshaw, of Rooden Lane, for ye time being, and a new coat (not exceeding twenty shillings) every other year for his trouble and pains in wakening sleepers in ye church, whipping out dogs, keeping children quiet and orderly, and keeping ye pulpit and church walks clean." There were similar bobbers by bequest at Trysull, Farmcote, Acton and Dunchurch. I knew of one parish where Bumble was armed with a long stick, having a knob at one end, and a fox's brush at the other. Should he espy a luckless labourer or a charity child nodding assent to the "sixthly," down came his knob with a crack like a gunshot; but when gentility was caught napping, its delicate nose was tickled gently by the brush.

"Nothing," says Lamont, "can justify a long sermon. If it be a good one it need not be long; if it be a bad one it ought not to be long."

Heavy and monotonous must have been the sermons of the saints during the Commonwealth; highly suggestive of Longfellow's lines:—

"A slumbrous sound, a sound that brings  
The feelings of a dream."

Suggestive, too, of the double meanings of the old sexton when an archdeacon was pointing out to churchwardens the dry rot which had seized upon the woodwork of the seats—"Lord, sir! that's nothing to what you'll find in the pulpit."

"Damp is the meadow's wide expanse  
And damp the garden and the manse;  
Damp is the church, the walls, the books,  
And damp the congregation looks.  
Damp, too, the surplice, sooth to say,  
On so'lemn confirmation day;  
Yet sometimes thou the horrid thrall mayst fly,  
Thy sermons, friend, *they* may be dry."

We hear of striking originality from the pulpit sometimes. A young Nonconformist was on probation at a little Bethel. His subject was the "Prodigal Son." His auditory, select and severe, were unmoved by his eloquence for half-an-hour. He would now touch them with his finer fancies; he would appeal to their tenderest feelings. "My dear friends! (with a sigh) the fatted calf! Notice! not one of Pharaoh's lean and ill-favoured kine; not one of five yoke of oxen—great ugly beasts; but a sweetly pretty, gentle, amiable fatted calf. No doubt (added the speaker with deepening pathos) it had been the children's dear little pet *for years*."

My first incumbent, Mr. Hughes, was very absent-minded. A well-known member of the congregation had enlivened dull December by bringing home his bride: and the ladies were on the tiptoe of expectation on the following Sunday to see what she was like. An involuntary smile was caused by the text—"Behold the bridegroom cometh." By no means diffident was the young lady who extracted a promise from her vicar that he would preach an appropriate sermon when she appeared at church on the Sunday following her marriage. The text was somewhat a surprise:—"Yea, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth."

Speaking of marriages, how amusing is the following incident. The incumbent of a populous parish in the Midlands who never failed to have publication of numerous banns, looked for the banns book as usual after the second lesson. Feeling assured of finding it he commenced: "I publish the banns of marriage—" An awkward pause, during which he looked beneath the service books, "but could not see my little friend, because he was not there." "I publish the banns," repeated he, still fumbling, "between—between—" "Between the cushion and the seat, sir," shouted the clerk, looking up and pointing to the place where the book had been mislaid.

Doctor Johnson said that only once was he on the horns of a dilemma. He had hold of an infuriated bull by the tail, and was painfully undecided whether to let go or not. Surely there is no more trying circumstance than to be beset by a wasp when reading the service. There is something highly attractive to that nettlesome insect in the folds of a surplice. Perhaps it thinks of the papyrus of its own nest; or the sedative of ordinary reading is a reminder of its big cousin, the humble bee, in a churn; or probably it instinctively knows that the reader is at its mercy. When I see a wasp flying about a church, I feel as certain as when in a train I see a mother with an infant in arms pass and re-pass the carriage window, that I am to be the victim. I fairly have the creeps when I think of those little yellow coated twins, Uz and Buz, his brother, dodging about the reading desk last August, and mocking my misery and impotency.

They came with the Psalms. The lectern was a few feet distant. I hoped to give them the slip when reading the lessons, and I saw with

satisfaction that one of them was taking the dimensions of a bottled-nosed gentleman in the nave. But the other returned, alas, to its first love with an attachment intensified by absence. It settled on the surplice sleeves ; it made a phrenological examination of the back of my head with a view to increasing its bumps ; it became entangled and therefore cross, among my scanty locks. To be stung suddenly and by chance is a small matter, but for fully ten minutes to be expecting the cruelly sharp venomous sting of a wasp crawling on the temples is, indeed, prolonged agony.

We had reached the Litany. I felt the horrid insect pausing at the tip of the nose. Free for one moment, whilst the choir responded "Good Lord deliver us," with my right hand I dashed my vicious enemy on to the reading desk, and smashed it with the hymn book. What an untold relief !

Whatever may be said to the contrary, the attendance at church in rural districts, especially of the labouring class, is distinctly on the decline. The attitude of one section of society may, perhaps, be inferred from the remark of a stalwart man of Kent in my former parish. "My mates at the public," said he, "cheeks me about going to church ; but I tells them I don't see no harm in going to church occasionally."

There are times, however, when no bell is needed to summon the lagging flock ; yet if some of our parochial benefactors of gallons of bread, scarlet cloaks, and fractional parts of a pound, could have realised the anxiety and difficulty of clerical trustees in distributing their gifts, I think some honorarium to them would have been the rule and not the exception.

In my first curacy, in my innocence I observed with pleasure the excellent attendance of the poor old men and women at the morning service in preference to the afternoon. I even mentioned the subject to them during my visits. "Why, you see," said one, "I feels more comfortabler like arter breakfast." Whined another old dame, all curtsies and front teeth : "Shure and indade, sorr, Misther Hughes, he gives such swate sermons, we would never be after staying away." Whilst a third, a diminutive gentleman in small clothes, declared he "Allers meant the fust thing to patternize St. Peter's."

"Gammon !" exclaimed my dear incumbent, who knew human nature to the core. "Wait next Sunday morning after service, and I will show you more substantial reasons."

Accordingly I walked with him up the south aisle, and in a deep recess formed by a window was a beautiful display of the largest of loaves left by a worthy alderman as a weekly dole. There stood the venerable expectants, with their heads bobbing in every direction "whilst washing their hands with invisible soap in imperceptible water."

How sweetly they smiled a welcome : how calmly they retired, conscious of a duty well done, until they had reached a respectful

distance, when the clatter of their wooden clogs was succeeded by the clatter of their metallic tongues, discoursing in language not strictly parliamentary, because "t' old parson" had not given the three loaves that remained to the seven-and-twenty who clamoured for them.

But of all dole days in the year, good St. Thomas bears the palm ; and when the anniversary falls on the Sunday I see no reason why testators' express wishes should be set aside, and another day selected for distribution. Far from it. The church is open and warm ; the service is not long, and it is quite as well that many of the applicants who never otherwise attend should for once in a way be called upon "to hear sermons." And yet it is a humiliating sight to witness a crowd of our fellow creatures flocking to the house of prayer "while their heart," to use an old phrase, "is in their half-penny."

What a wonderful reviver is a five-shilling piece. At its bright presence darkness, in the shape of human ills, flies away. The elderly lady whose "cuff" is that troublesome that she never *can* sit in church, finds it a prospective panacea which keeps the "cuff" where such cuffs should ever be, at arms' length. The gentleman of three-score whose "rheumatiz" always monopolises one day in seven, is, as he adds, "particularly free and easy" on the twenty-first day of December. The mother of eight who somehow never can leave her little ones, suddenly remembers a resolution made twelve months before, and is determined, come what may, that she will attend church this morning. Oh, good St. Thomas ! what virtue may we not ascribe to thy potency ; and yet how short-lived. I take thy wand on the morrow, but its charm has gone. The Sunday bonnet is hung up for the year ; the "rheumatiz" returns to its resting-place ; the woman who is always ailing, and cannot tell what is the matter, finds a local habitation and a name for every ailment ; the seat at church is deserted until the shrine of St. Thomas be re-decked with silver : then, ah, then—Redivivus !

Apart from such *doleful* days, my experience of the labouring class has shown that their attendance at the parish church is carefully regulated by the material benefits they can extract from the parson, and may be thus tabulated :—

The gift of an old coat, three months' attendance ; ditto pair of black cloth trousers, six weeks' ; ditto waistcoat, three weeks' ; ditto pair of strong boots, two weeks' ; ditto the shirt off one's back, one week.



## OVER THE SPLÜGEN.

IT was in the summer of the year 18—that I travelled with my wife over the Splügen Pass on our way to the Italian Lakes. Soon after the birth of our first child she had fallen into delicate health and the doctors urged me to take her away for a year's sojourn on the Continent.

We left England, and by degrees she rallied under the mountain air of Switzerland and began to take more interest in what was going on around her. We lingered for some weeks in the neighbourhood of Lucerne, choosing the higher stations on the lake for the sake of quiet and cooler air; and I was just about to propose a move to the Engadine, or to some place near Zermatt, from which we would, as winter drew near, find our way to the Riviera, when Lucy surprised me by expressing a strong wish to visit Lake Como, urging that the Engadine was cold, and the excursions both there and around Zermatt would be too fatiguing for her.

Hitherto she had allowed me to take her where I pleased, without asking a question or making an objection, and I hailed the fact of her expressing a preference as a great improvement. I was only too glad to gratify any desire of hers, and before many days had gone by, we quitted Lucerne and passing through Zurich took up our quarters at Ragatz.

It was about a week later that we went over early one morning by train to Chur and secured a comfortable carriage to take us by way of the Splügen to Chiavenna. The weather was clear and fine when we started, and I was pleased to see my wife in better spirits than she had been for a long time.

At Thusis we were to stay the night. It is under twenty miles from Chur and we might easily have gone further, but there seemed to me no reason for doing so. We had plenty of time at our disposal.

I was so delighted with the scenery around Thusis I should have been willing to have remained there two or three days, but Lucy preferred to go on, so we adhered to our original plan.

Thusis is situated on a terrace at the entrance of Via Mala. The Schyn road opens there, too, by which, through the valley of the Albula to Tiefen-kasten, one can get to the Engadine, and there are many other walks and excursions. But the principal attraction of the place is the gorge of the Via Mala, and we agreed to walk part of the way through this so as to see it to the greatest advantage; letting our carriage follow us so that if we were tired we could rest at will.

I need not describe the place. Everyone has seen it and marvelled

at its tremendous precipices which seem as if they would close on any traveller who is so presumptuous as to attempt to make a way through them. It is not a cheerful scene; not even when, as was the case the day we were there, the sun is shining with all its brilliancy and the sky is of a deep, clear blue.

Looking up from its depths we seem to be shut out from the world, to be piercing our way through the bowels of the earth. The long tunnel, called the Verlorenes Loch, is more dismal still; it is narrow, long and dark, and every sound re-echoes from its walls. As we turn and gaze at the ruined castle of Realt and the beautiful valley of Domschleg, lying bright in the sunshine, it is like taking a farewell of life. This is a charming picture with its frame of black rocks and its fringe of dark pine trees, but the tunnel is damp and we dare not linger long. We pass out and look over the precipice at the young Rhine—the only living thing, it seems, as it hurries on eager to be free, anxious to play its part in the world, and to bear its burden as a noble river should.

At the second bridge, one of the most striking objects, we sit on the broad parapet to rest. We can scarcely see the river now, and the cliffs almost meet overhead. It is strange, indeed, that anyone should have thought of making a road through such a cleft as this; and we speculate, as we look around us, on how it came to be done, and talk of the scenes that have taken place along the pass, and wonder at the daring and courage of the men of old.

“Who,” questions Lucy, “would think of bringing an army through here in these times?” and we proceed to discuss the changes that have taken place in modern artillery, and other subjects of which we are equally ignorant.

This parapet, with its broad stone facing, is a great comfort to Lucy, who is apt to turn giddy on an unprotected precipice. Now she sits tranquil and enjoys a scene which to her is new and strange. Our driver, Anton, is an intelligent young fellow, and very attentive; he is much discomfited that it is only possible for him to communicate with Lucy through me, as Lucy does not understand German. He is, I see plainly, much struck with Lucy’s beauty, and as he cannot address her, tries to make up for it by plucking flowers and offering them to her whenever we stop. Lucy accepts these expressions of good-will with great good-nature, and smiles her thanks, supremely unconscious of the havoc a glance from her blue eyes makes on the poor man’s susceptible heart.

We did not hurry ourselves, for we had arranged to stay the night at the village of Splügen. I did not expect to find good accommodation there: one rarely does in the smaller inns on the mountain passes; but in view of the advantage of affording proper rest to the invalid, we were prepared to accept a few disagreeables. Later on I certainly regretted that I had not pushed on that night to Chiavenna—but I must not anticipate. What befell us the next morning might

have happened at any time, and I quite believe I acted for the best.

Splügen is a lonely place ; there is nothing attractive about the village itself, and the great mountains around are more gloomy than beautiful. There were very few visitors at the inn, and they were neither friendly nor sociable. The landlady, however, was good-natured and kind. Seeing Lucy's delicate looks she bustled about, hastened to kindle a large fire in our bedroom, and recommended us to take our supper there. She tried her best to make us comfortable, but her resources were small.

We passed a very indifferent night. Poor Lucy was tired and only slept at intervals. I fear the sheets were damp, and this was scarcely to be avoided, for at nightfall everything became shrouded in a thick white mist which penetrated the house and chilled us through and through. We were thankful when morning dawned. A brisk wind sprang up then, which cleared away the fog and allowed the rays of the sun to warm the air. Before ten o'clock it was difficult to believe we had so lately been half frozen, the sun was scorching hot and gave every promise of a brilliant day.

It was about eleven when we set forth once more on our upward way. The summit of the pass, some 2,000 feet higher than the village of Splügen, is reached in about two hours. It is a dreary-looking place, with snow lying in heaps and no vegetation of any kind. Half-an-hour more brought us to the boundary line, where there is a Custom House. Here they detained us for a few minutes but gave us no trouble. They asked sundry questions, refused most graciously our proffered keys, and bowing politely, allowed us to pass on.

The view a little further down is very grand ; one of the finest, as I think, on the pass ; we look over the great glacier of Curciusa to the peaks beyond, which seem of immense height. I am enchanted with its beauty, but as the descent gets steeper Lucy turns pale and complains of feeling giddy. She asks me if it is safe. I answer boldly, Yes. People travel daily along this road ; there is nothing to fear.

To please her I appeal to our driver ; he echoes my words, and adds that we are as safe as if we were in our beds ; he has been on this road for ten years and has never met with an accident. So far so good.

We drive on. I try to make Lucy talk, but without success. I even bring up the subject of Georgie—a thing I do very seldom. It is a serious thing to begin to discuss Georgie ; it may make the mother happy, it may make her sad, and anyhow it lasts a very long time. Now, however, she actually says : "Dear child. Yes, I know ; but I cannot talk now," and she lies back with her eyes closed. Seeing which I leave her in peace.

Why does Anton turn his head so frequently ? Why does he drive so fast ? I am not nervous, as Lucy is ; still it appears to me we are

going along at an unusually rapid rate. I do not say so, of course ; it will not do to alarm my wife ; but at last I bend forward and ask him in a low voice the reason of this. He points backward with his whip but makes no other answer.

I cannot make him out ; yesterday he was so chatty and bright, only anxious to please ; why is he to-day so silent and stern ?

I put the question a second time, but he only clenches his teeth, gives the horse nearest to him a cut with the whip, and we rush on more furiously than ever. Lucy does not notice this ; I think she has fallen asleep. I disengage my hand gently from hers, rise from my seat, and turning, look behind me. I see in the distance a heavily-laden waggon making its way down the hill as quickly, so it appears to me, as we do. This relieves me : it must be, I imagine, the custom to descend the pass at this pace ; the drivers doubtless know what they are about ; it is absurd to be uneasy.

Some feeling, however, prevents my sitting down again (luckily Lucy sleeps on and does not remark my unusual position), and I continue to stand and gaze at the vehicle behind us. It has a sort of fascination for me, I cannot turn my eyes from it. "Surely," I murmur, "it cannot be coming down even faster than we are."

I try to shake off the horrible idea and to assure myself the drivers understand their horses and have them under proper control.

Some few moments go by. I still keep my watch, now kneeling on the seat, for my legs give way under me. A thrill runs through me.

Once more Anton turns his head, and a low, muttered curse escapes him. His face is blanched, his eyes are round with terror. Great Heavens ! I see it all now. The men on the cart have no control over their horses ; the weight they carry is too great for the slope of the road, the impetus is too strong—they cannot stop if they would.

What is to become of us ? I try to remember that there is room for two vehicles on the road ; and that the waggon might go past us in safety, if guided by a firm hand—but at the same moment I feel that can never be. No hand can guide that terrible car now advancing to destroy us—no hand but One.

A wild idea crosses my mind that we might stop our carriage, get out, climb up the bank and so save ourselves.

I say a wild idea, because it is one impossible to be carried out, though I still think that when Anton first recognised our danger that would have been the wisest thing to do. Then for a few yards the bank sloped away from the road, and there might have been space for us on the rocks. Now this is not practicable. The cliff is perfectly straight, and besides, God help us, the waggon would be down upon us long before we could get out of the way. Our sole chance is "to fly as if the wolves of Apennine were all upon our track," and this we are doing. Faster and faster Anton urges on his horses till the poor animals are covered with foam and sweat, and their

breathing is loud and painful. I meet Anton's glance, and we look despairingly and in silence into each other's eyes.

It is a flight for dear life and we know it.

I turn to look at Lucy. She slumbers peacefully, though our carriage rocks from side to side, and threatens to overset us as we clear the sharp curve of the zigzag. Were I to wake her now and tell her of our danger, it would kill her, in her weak state. And then how can I wake her and tell her I am powerless to save her from an awful death? No, let her sleep, poor child, if she can. I have no heart to rouse her—to rouse her from a pleasant dream of her infant boy—to the conviction that she will never see his rosy face again in this world.

What a change to come upon us in a few short hours. Only this morning we were speaking of how, as the years went on, we would train our boy, and strive to set him a good example; we had prayed to God to spare him to us and let him be a blessing to our old age. Poor Georgie; you will never know the parents who loved you so tenderly.

Nearer and nearer comes the dreadful waggon, louder and louder sounds the crashing of its wheels, and faster and faster we fly onward. A loud cry from Anton rouses Lucy; she looks up in terror. Alas! she reads no comfort in my face; she sees no reassuring smile. I try to speak, but my lips are dry and no words will come. I can only give a deep groan, and, sinking into my seat, cover my face with my hands.

We rush with such a whirl round the next zigzag that Lucy screams and clings to me in agony. We hear a great crash. Our pace slackens. I feel our time is come. My heart is beating so wildly that I cannot look up. Then we stop, and when, with an effort, I raise my head, Lucy is lying in a dead faint at my feet, Anton has left his seat and is crouched on the road-side crying like a child, our horses are panting and breathless—but we are saved.

At the last corner the great waggon, with its heavy load and its four horses, has gone headlong over the precipice.

It was a good while before either of us could do anything to help the other. Poor Anton had stuck to his post and done his duty bravely while there was need, but now the sudden relief from a prospect of certain death rendered him helpless, and he trembled like a leaf. I was not much better, and when poor Lucy struggled from her faint and asked for water, we were both unable to get it for her.

Before long a carriage, with a large party of English tourists coming up from Chiavenna, stopped and rendered us what assistance they could. They were much impressed by the danger they themselves had incurred, and deeply grateful to have been spared the knowledge of it.

Under the care of the ladies, Lucy revived slowly, though she

was sadly agitated, and, leaving her with them, I went with the gentlemen to search for the unfortunate carmen. We found one of them lying badly wounded just at the turn of the road; he had thrown himself out of the waggon just in time to save his life. The other man went down with his horses. I heard afterwards his body was found hundreds of feet below, his hands clutching at the reins—faithful to his duty to the last.

A stiff glass of brandy restored Anton's nerves, and he soon declared himself able to proceed. The English party volunteered to remain with the wounded man till we sent back help from the next station, and we departed, driving slowly.

At the next village we were soon surrounded by a crowd of people wishful to hear the details of the accident and eager to be of service. I should have been glad if it had been possible to remain there, for we were all in need of rest and quiet; but it seemed a poor place, and I saw it would be difficult to procure the comforts my wife required; so we held on our course for Chiavenna.

There we remained for some days. I was thankful to find that Lucy was less affected by the shock than might have been expected; her sleep had mercifully spared her much anxiety, or I tremble to think what the effect might have been on her weakened frame. As it was I believe I suffered more than she did, and it was well I had time and opportunity for rest, or our positions as invalid and nurse might have been reversed. A strong constitution enabled me soon to throw off the depression caused by the event of that terrible day; but I think, when our time came for returning home, I was no less thankful than my wife that to reach England it was not necessary to travel over the Splügen.

C. N. C.



## A GUIDE FROM DREAMLAND.

By J. P. MAY.

A LARGE city, with thousands and thousands of houses showing dark and grimy against the red and gold of an autumn sunset; large factory chimneys towering from the midst of other buildings and belching forth clouds of black smoke to mar the pure evening atmosphere; and further down, a river, with dark and muddy waters, flowing past the busy manufacturing town, and hurrying to purify itself among the sweet meadows which lay in the dim distance.

On one of the bridges which crossed the broad stream, and which was situated in the very midst of the town, stood a little girl. She was bending down over the parapet, and was gazing dreamily at the dark waters below.

Evidently the child was used to this point of observation, for the continual hurry-scurry of the passers-by did not in the least disturb her meditations. Sad meditations they seemed to be, for now and then a sigh parted the little one's lips and tears glistened on her long, dark lashes.

Poor Daisy! Poor little motherless girl! No one heeded the ragged child with the long golden curls and the dark blue eyes; no one spoke to her, no one had a smile for her, and she thought of the time when she had had a mother, who had been proud of her, and who, if she could not give her handsome clothes like those of the merry children she saw with their nurses, had at least always striven to keep her clean and neat and done what she could to teach and train her aright. And as Daisy was a sensitive child and not over strong, she underwent no end of sacrifices to keep her from rough companions and other kinds of deadening influences. And often at eventide, by the firelight, she would sit and tell her stories of olden time: of elves and fairies, and the good genii of the forest and the glade, as well as recollections of her own past life—her early girlhood; and would sing many a song for the child's sake, when her own heart was far from being untroubled about the present and the future.

Her mother! It seemed so long to her since she had seen her lying there so calm and peaceful and heard someone say: "She is dead!" Such a long, long time! And yet it was only in May, and it is September now.

Of her father, Daisy remembered but little, for she was only ten, and he had been dead for over six years. He was an honest brick-layer, and they were so happy, he and his wife, with their little girl! But one day he was brought home dying. His skull had been fractured by a fall from a ladder; and that same day Alice White was a widow.

Since then she had striven to earn a sufficient living for her little one and herself as a seamstress, but alas ! it was weary, weary work, and the continual bending and stitching had brought on that terrible foe, consumption. And one beautiful day in May, when the birds were singing blithely and the woods were green, Daisy missed her mother's kiss for the first time, and learned to know the meaning of the word orphan. Since then she had been living at her uncle's, but it was a very different life from that she had been accustomed to.

Her uncle lived in two rooms in the fourth storey of a dirty, rickety house in one of the most miserable alleys of the city. He had been a bricklayer, like her father, but had lost his place through his love of drink, and now he earned a little by odd jobs, but passed most of his time in the gin-shop, while his wife, a slatternly virago, bullied the poor little one till she was wearied of life.

John Gray himself was not really a *bad* man had he not been such a drunkard. In a moment of soberness (a rare occurrence !) he had promised his sister on her death-bed to take care of Daisy ; for he was her only relation. So Daisy went with him to her new home. She soon found, however, that her life here was to be no sinecure ; for Mrs. Gray had no idea of keeping a child who could not earn her own living. And John Gray, who always conceded to his wife (he was a little afraid of her sharp tongue), thought, too, that Daisy ought to do something. So she was sent out in the mornings with a tray with boxes of matches, packets of pins, and other small articles which she was to try to sell in the streets. But oh ! it was dreary work and a slow business !

Then in the afternoon she had to sweep up, and nurse the children, a baby of six months and one of eighteen months, till her arms used to ache. And she did not dare to complain for fear of a sharply administered slap from Mrs. Gray's grimy fingers.

The only part of the day in which Daisy was a little less miserable was in the evening, when the children were asleep and she could slip from the house and wander down to the bridge. And there she would crouch down in some corner and watch, through the bars of the parapet, the barges and the steamers on the river. There she could be still and think ; think of the old times with her darling mother.

On this evening Daisy was more wearied even than her wont. The children had been restless and Aunt Gray had been more ill-tempered than usual, and besides, business had been bad in the morning, and she had dragged about her wares in vain for many a long mile.

Sitting down in her favourite corner, she wept softly. It did her a lot of good to cry ; so she did cry, till her tears seemed quite exhausted. Then she leant back and closed her eyes. Suddenly she heard a low, soft voice say : "Daisy, Daisy !" and looking up she saw the strangest old man she had ever seen in her life. He was very, very small, and was dressed in a queer old suit of black

clothes, with a swallow-tailed coat, the ends of which touched his heels. On his head was an immense and entirely straight chimney-pot hat.

But however ridiculous his attire might have been, Daisy thought she had never seen such a beautiful face before—except her mother's. It would have been difficult to say in what the beauty consisted. Perhaps in the kind blue eyes which shone from underneath the thick white eyebrows; or perhaps in the silky white hair which hung down on his shoulders; or the long white beard which covered his breast; or perhaps again it could be attributed to his rosy skin, which bore hardly a wrinkle in spite of his white hair and apparent old age.

Daisy gazed in a bewildered manner at this strange personage, and at this he began to laugh softly, a laugh like the sound of a silver bell.

"Daisy," he began, when his mirth had subsided, "why were you crying just now?"

"I was thinking of my mother, sir."

"Ah, yes, she was a good woman; a good woman! You are not happy at your uncle's?"

"No," answered Daisy truthfully, inwardly wondering how this little man knew so much about her, and especially how he had known her mother, and that she had never seen him.

"Would you like to live with a good woman like your mother, in a handsome house?"

"Ah, yes! but that will never be!"

"Come with me, Daisy," said the little man imperiously, and the child rose obediently.

Straight past the bridge he led her, down a broad handsome street, and then to the left, and then to the right, in and out, till Daisy was dazed and bewildered.

At last they came into a broader and handsomer street than any they had been through before. Beautiful houses, with large bay windows, stood in solemn majesty there, and through the drawn blinds one could catch glimpses of splendid chandeliers and magnificent candelabras. Out of some of the houses issued the sounds of music; soft, dreamy waltzes and merry polkas; and many a happy laugh floated out into the evening air. Grand carriages stood before some of the doors, and out of them stepped ladies in sweeping satins or soft velvet, their trailing skirts making a gentle rustle as they ascended the broad steps to the houses.

All this Daisy saw as she passed, and would like to have stood and watched all the magnificence longer. But the little man only chuckled as he noted her longing, and said:

"There's better still; there's better still!"

And so on they went, this strange pair, hand-in-hand, till they reached the end of the road. Before the corner house the mysterious friend stopped. It was a large handsome building. No music floated from its windows, but the blinds were not yet drawn,

and one could see the cosy gaslight shining through red globes ; one could distinguish, too, the heavy red curtains which hung in sombre draperies on either side. Handsome pictures in broad, gilt frames hung on the walls, and large marble busts ornamented the many costly brackets. Somehow Daisy thought this the nicest house of all.

Suddenly the sound of carriage-wheels roused her from her contemplation, and she saw a handsome brougham, drawn by two prancing greys, dash up to the house and stop in front of it.

A footman sprang down and, opening the door, helped a lady to get out. The lamplight shone on her face, and Daisy could see how pretty and good and kind she looked. She wore no gay ball-dress, but long, sombre, artistic folds of velvet fell round her majestic figure and made it look more queenly still.

Suddenly Daisy felt her companion seize her by the arm and draw her towards the lady. At the sound of footsteps the latter turned and saw the little girl. For a moment she stood still and looked at her ; then she cried :

“ Oh ! what a darling child ! What eyes ! Just the thing I wanted ! Come with me ! ”

And before she had time to think, she was within the gate, the lady holding her hand. She looked behind to see if her old friend was following, when she regrettfully saw him getting dimmer and dimmer, till he faded at last into air and disappeared. And while she stood spell-bound, wondering at this strange sight, the lady’s hold on her fingers relaxed, she seemed to feel herself sinking, sinking, sinking ! She gave a cry and shut her eyes.

When she opened them again she was sitting in her old corner on the bridge, alone and friendless ! The sunset glow had disappeared from the sky ; the night had fallen ; thousands of lights shone in the great city, and only in the child’s heart was darkness. Oh, why had Heaven sent her that happy dream, to make her home seem all the more miserable when she should have to go to it ? She looked around, half-expecting to see that strange old friend, but she saw only indifferent faces passing on till they were lost to view. Only a dream ! A beautiful, enchanting, deceitful dream ! Poor Daisy ! poor little forsaken flower !

“ I must go home,” she said half aloud to herself. And the thought of *that* home was like gall to her, since she had seen, if only in imagination, what some homes were like. Ah ! how unjust, she thought, that some people should be so rich and happy, while others had only misery and poverty all around them ! Daisy, Daisy ! you have still to learn that not riches alone give contentment, and that many a brocaded bodice hides an aching heart !

Turning round, she looked down the bridge. Straight in front of her lay the very road through which she had passed first in her dream ! She must have often seen it before, but it had never struck

her until now. Moved by some irresistible impulse, she hastened towards it and hurried past the gaily-lighted shops without giving them a look. Her little head was strangely excited, and she could not have said what feeling impelled her onward.

First to the left, then to the right, on she walked, recognising the streets as she went along. To the right again and then to the left, the little one hurried on, till she stood before a large and handsome road. She knew it well, and her heart gave a great throb. She did not know what to think ; she only knew one thing, and that was to her as clear as daylight : this was the road where her dream had ended, and—yonder in the distance—the corner house ! Yes, there the beautiful lady had stepped from her carriage, there she had taken her by the hand, and there the dream had ended so suddenly, so unexpectedly.

As she ran, she heard the waltzes, the polkas and the gay laughter wasted on the air from the houses. But she took no notice of them this time, but ran on, the evening breeze tossing about her golden curls as she went.

Yes, there it was ! The same happy, bright-looking house, the blinds still up, the rosy light giving a cheerful air to the surroundings and casting a shimmer of pink on the large busts on the brackets. The curtains seemed to hang in the very same folds as when she had seen them in fancy.

Suddenly she saw a servant, in a neat black dress and spotless apron, enter the room ; and then the blind was slowly drawn down and the pictures and busts and the red light disappeared from her view.

Still she stood there, regretfully gazing at the dark window, and as she gazed, she heard behind her the sound of carriage-wheels. Up dashed a beautifully appointed landau and stopped before the house. Two splendid greys stood pawing the ground and tossing their handsome heads ; the footman in quiet livery alighted and opened the door, and Daisy's bewildered eyes beheld the lady in the black velvet robe stepping majestically out of the carriage. But she was not alone. Behind her alighted another lady, smaller and of a slighter build ; still, from a certain likeness in the features, it was easy to guess that they were sisters.

Daisy's heart beat fast as the two ladies passed her. If they would only notice her ! If she could only get one smile from those kind, sweet faces ! As the thought crossed her mind, she sighed aloud ; the smaller lady turned and saw her. A flash of admiration passed through her eyes, and she seized her companion by the arm :

“Look, Eva, what a sweet face ! Such an one as you want for your group ! Quite a poor child, too.”

The other lady stopped and looked at Daisy : a kind, gentle look.

“Yes, Mildred, you are right ; she would do well. But she may have parents who would not be willing to let her come and sit for me. What is your name, little one ?”

"Daisy White, ma'am."

"Daisy! a fitting name for a little flower; is it not, Mildred? Where do you live, Daisy?"

Daisy named the street. The lady looked compassionate, and her companion exclaimed :

"Oh, Eva! Poor child! it is such a horrid place!"

"Have you a father and mother, child?"

"Oh, no!" and the little one's eyes filled with tears. "They are both in heaven, ma'am."

The two ladies looked at each other in surprise; the child spoke in very refined language for one of the inhabitants of such a street as that she had named. They were touched, too, at the sorrow in her eyes.

"Whom do you live with, then?"

"With my uncle and aunt; but they do not care about me, ma'am. I sell matches and pins and things like that in the streets, but there are not many people that buy."

"Would you like to come into my house, Daisy, and sit still so that I could paint you in a picture?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am!" was the eager reply, and Daisy's eyes sparkled at the idea of entering that lovely house.

"Then you must come here to-morrow at eleven o'clock—or stay, I will come for you and speak to your aunt."

"Take her in now, Eva, and give her something to eat; she looks half starved."

"So she does, Mildred, and you are right, as you always are. Come, Daisy." And she took the little one by the hand and led her up the broad steps, through a large corridor, into that cosy room with the red light.

"Sit down, Daisy, and wait a moment until we come back," said the elder lady, and Daisy sat down as in a dream, and hoped that if it was a dream she might never awaken.

After awhile, the ladies came back; they had taken off their hats and cloaks and looked so good and kind.

They evidently seemed to have given some orders already, for as soon as the elder one rang the bell, a footman appeared bearing a tray on which were spread a few nice substantial things.

"Now, Daisy," said the younger lady, spreading out the things on the table, "come and sit down here and have a nice supper; and after that, you must tell us all about yourself."

So Daisy ate her supper thankfully, and after she had finished she looked up with those great blue eyes of hers and said: "How good you are to me! better even than in my dream."

"Your dream, Daisy! Why, what was that?"

So Daisy told her whole story, and the two listened attentively till she had finished.

"Well, Providence seems to have meant you to have come to us,

Daisy," said Mrs. Crawford, for that was the lady-artist's name. "So you shall stay here for to-night. It is too late to go home now, and we will find a nice little bed for you somewhere. To-morrow we will see what is to be done. Eh, Mildred?"

"Yes, dear, that is right," said Miss Stokes, the younger lady; "the lassie is sure to be tired."

And so, to Daisy's wonder and delight, she was consigned to the care of Mrs. Martin, the housekeeper, and soon found herself lying in a cosy bed with soft, downy pillows, and her last recollection was of Mrs. Crawford's sweet face bending over her, bidding her good-night. And her dreams were rose-coloured.

"Mildred."

"Well, Eva?"

Mrs. Crawford was sitting in an arm-chair and her sister was facing her. They had been talking about the little girl they had just put to bed, and Mrs. Crawford's face bore a thoughtful expression, as if an idea had just struck her.

"Well, Eva?"

"I have been thinking, Mildred, of what a lonely life you and I lead. Since my husband died, you know, I have often spoken of adopting some pretty, gentle little girl. Well, Daisy is pretty and gentle, isn't she?"

"Yes," replied Miss Stokes, smiling. "I guessed what was in your head, Eva, ever since I noticed that thoughtful look in your eyes."

"Do you approve the idea, then?"

"Why, yes, with all my heart, if the uncle consents. I am rarely deceived in my first judgment of a character, and I believe Daisy to be a really good, lovable child."

"And it seems as if Providence sent her to us; don't you think so?"

"Yes, it is strange. But strange things do happen, and one is tempted to believe in dreams sometimes."

"Well, we must speak to her relations; and if they are willing, and her own heart says Yes, why she shall stay and be our little girl."

So the next day the Grays, who had not known what to think of Daisy's absence, were rather astonished when they saw two such grand ladies enter, holding Daisy by the hand.

Mrs. Crawford briefly related the events of the preceding evening, and explained the object of her visit.

John Gray, who was quite sober for once, and thought of his promise to his dying sister, hummed and hawed a good deal at first; and Mrs. Gray vehemently opposed the scheme, saying the child was useful to them; but at last Mrs. Crawford succeeded in convincing them that it would be for the best; and so they finally consented, and signed a paper which Mrs. Crawford had had ready for use.

After the ladies and Daisy had left, Gray and his wife were

agreeably surprised to find on the table a twenty-pound note, which Mrs. Crawford had laid there, and beside it, on a slip of paper, were the words : "To make up for the loss of Daisy."

It is ten years later. The month of May is drawing to a close, and the Art Exhibition has just been opened. In the principal room of the building hangs a picture which attracts all eyes by its bold, artistic colouring, and by its expression and depth of feeling. As the catalogue can tell, it is called "Homeless," and represents a bridge in a great city at sunset. A little girl, with golden curls and faded clothes, is leaning over the parapet, gazing wistfully and with tearful eyes into the ripples beneath. The indifference of the passers-by is well portrayed, and the whole picture is powerful and suggestive.

Two artists stop before it.

"Fine picture, that—288."

"Very ; especially when one considers the age of the artist."

"How so ?"

"Why, don't you know ? Margaret Wray is the name assumed by a young girl of about twenty, a young protégée of the well-known Mrs. Crawford."

"Indeed ! Well, her picture is most admirable."

"Yes ; it does her great credit, and predicts a brilliant future. The sunset is grand."

And they move on. But three ladies behind them have heard what they said. Two of them appear sisters, and must be both between forty and fifty ; but the third cannot be more than twenty, and is strikingly beautiful and refined.

"Did you hear what they said, Daisy ?" asks the elder lady. "It was very complimentary to you. They are no ordinary critics, for they are two of the ablest artists of the day. I am proud of you, child !"

Daisy's eyes shine with happy pride as she answers softly : "Ah, Aunt Eva, I owe it all to you and Aunt Mildred. I shall never, never be able to repay such a debt !"

"No, Daisy," answered Mrs. Crawford, with a smiling face, though there is a very tender expression in her eyes : "not to us do you owe it all, but to a certain little 'Guide from Dreamland.'"



## A BEATITUDE.

"Blessed are they that mourn."

O SWEETEST words of Holy Writ,  
And dearest Son of God that spake !  
Our grief, since Thou hast looked on it,  
Is blessed for Thy sake.

We cannot help the lot that falls,  
Obedient to the perfect mind ;  
We parley with the voice that calls,  
But Thou, Lord, Thou art kind !

'Twere better this or that, we say—  
To live long summers out and grow  
To ripeness, with a riper day,  
Nor fade before the snow :

Forgetful that Thy summers range  
Through other spheres and larger space,  
Nor ever lapse, nor suffer change,  
Made perfect by Thy face.

Though few be all our years below,  
We have a glorious hope in this—  
The steps we came, the steps we go,  
Link two eternities.

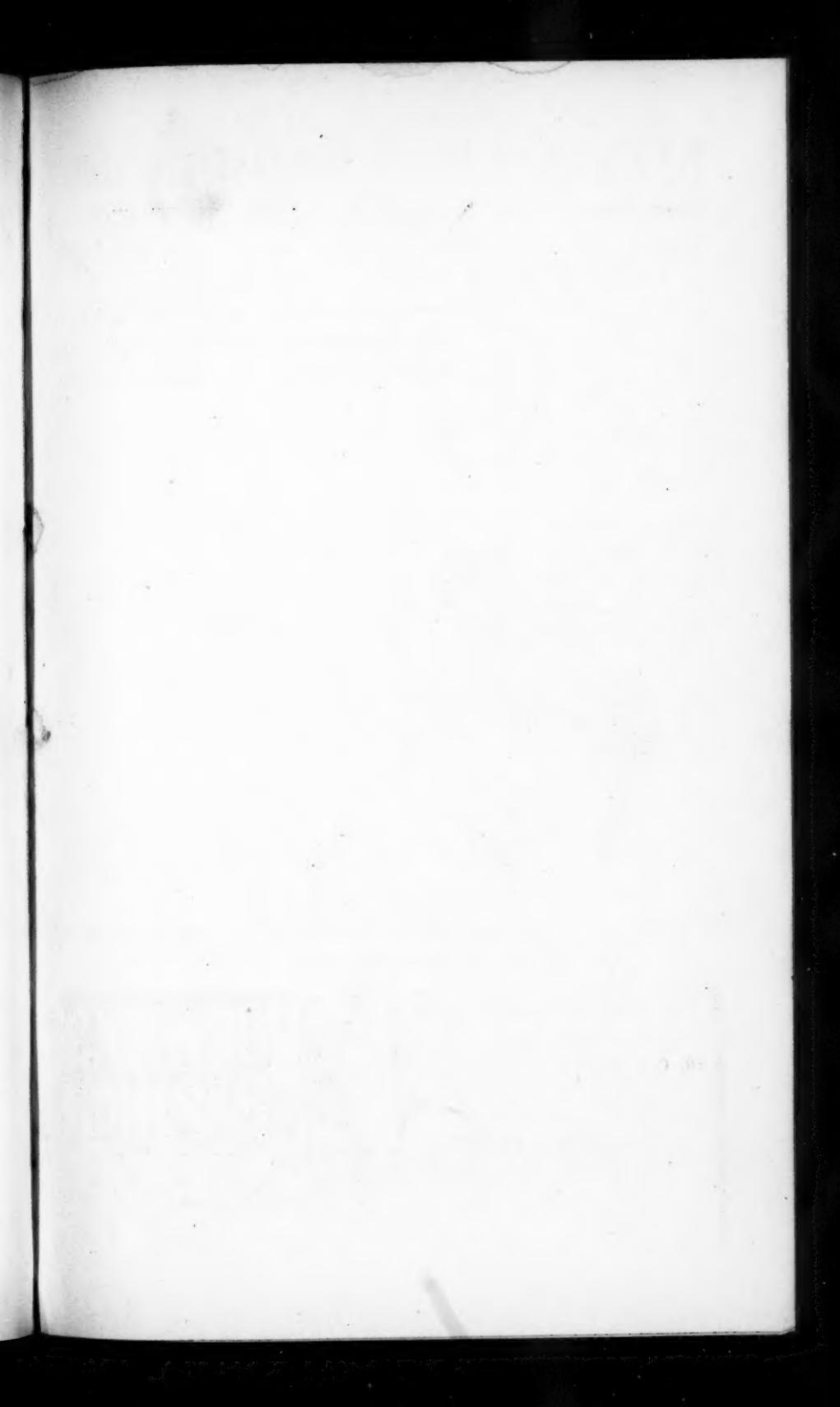
How, then, if one among us pass  
Beyond the outer veil, and win  
The crown and robe of righteousness,  
And meet the King within ;

Shall we not count his glory gain,  
And daily in our closet pray  
That, living not our lives in vain,  
We may go up that way ?

Poor heart of man, so brave, so weak !  
Poor stricken hearts that can but feel !  
Come, take ye blessing all who seek,  
This love is strong to heal :

No other voice is half so sweet—  
"Blessed are they that mourn," He said ;  
Lay all your sorrows at His feet,  
Stay, and "be comforted."

GEORGE COTTERELL.





J. SWAIN.

AT THAT MOMENT MRS. LENNARD CAME IN.

M. ELLEN STAPLES.